

COLLISION

BRIDGET
MACLAGAN

To Mrs. Sitwell?

from

Elizabeth MacLagan

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COLLISION

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE MISTRESS OF KINGDOMS

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DUCKWORTH & CO.

3 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

COLLISION

BY

BRIDGET MACLAGAN

AUTHOR OF

"THE MISTRESS OF KINGDOMS"



LONDON

DUCKWORTH & CO.

3 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

1913

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A. W. D.



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PART I
ANNANDALE



CHAPTER I

HE had been introduced to half a hundred people and had fled to a sequestered corner behind some palms on the verandah, from which he could survey the throng ; and then, suddenly, he saw her alight in their midst, scattering them to a wide circle about her, as some great beauty of the jungle might leap into a barnyard. In that moment, before hostess and guest perceived one another, and before he himself recognized the notorious little giant beside her, he beheld the whole scene, beheld it so brilliantly clear, so crowded with detail, that it was as though they had all been petrified before him for an age. And he took them in—the whole lot of them as they eyed her startled and fascinated, while she gazed about her superbly.

It was one of those suffocating, cloud-capped days when India, deprived of her sun, lies sick and grey under a garment of dust. Dust, thick and white upon every leaf, upon all the many chrysanthemums haggard and sullen, like old

bedraggled women, lining in dejected rows the walks and ovals of the garden. Even the close grey sky seemed dusty, and the crowd gathered upon the lawn of the Commissioner's Compound moved about aimlessly, languidly, restlessly; while in the centre of the front oval, the hostess, slender and vivacious, defied the dreary languor of the multitude.

Annandale was paying the Digbys his annual visit, journeying north from Bombay as was his custom, to spend his Christmas week with them; and, as usual on these occasions was treating himself to the indulgence of his one cherished dissipation, the celebration of his day with Susan Digby in a kind of festival of appreciation. Always she had seemed to him a woman marked for suffering, and since her marriage he had watched her in a terror of admiration harness her capricious energies to the load no less colossal because invisible to the world. As Sue Maclanahan she had been a wild thing, always in trouble and out of it, fragile and spirited, ardent and intolerant, loving and hating, with pain for many in the wit of her tongue and healing for all in her eyes, and he had watched her change, until now, in the

midst of his sceptic musings concerning the things of life, he came always upon the extraordinary fact of her development through suffering. She had seemed to him at first like a thin silver knife set to hew away a mountain of stone, and he had yelled at the fates on the day of her departure for India, that she would break, or be worn out of all beauty. She was not broken, but worn, most assuredly ; beautifully, blessedly worn. Of course he realized that if he ever talked to anyone like this, they would call him a lunatic ; but he knew. It was just because he loved them both so much, that he had been allowed to know. Digby was a big man. He was great, great in executive ability, in his capacity for work, in his knowledge of men, in his wide geniality that made him popular with the Indians, great too in his dependence on his wife. More than that, he was delightful and unexpected. He was shamefacedly a student—the authority on Persian poetry and aquatic worms. In secrecy he collected precious manuscripts and strange little bottles. Ah yes ! Digby was wonderful, but then Digby was accursed. His wife had known it from the beginning and she never forgot, not even as

she stood there greeting the hundredth guest with undiminished vivacity and turning her graceful head every now and then with a quick movement in the direction of her husband's voice that rolled up over the murmur of talk in big waves of jollity.

And to these two had come Imogen Daunt ; Moggie as Susan called her ; Moggie, with her fatal power over men and her healthy, unimagina-tive mind and her untouched heart ; and lastly, Moggie possessed by her Idea.

There she was, towering in the centre of that circle, swaying a little with that Andalusian movement of the hips, looking at them all through those absurdly insolent eyes. As he watched her, he laughed, for with all her length of limb and breadth of shoulder and weight of hair, she was funny. She was Imogen Daunt, the famous socialist, the leader of the woman's movement, and yet she was just Moggie. And he shouted to himself, " Of course, of course ! " It was preposterous and absurd, but it was true. He knew her. He had seen her do it before, on the Terrace of the House of Commons, from the balcony of a New York Hotel. In one instant she had become the

centre of everyone's interest, suddenly and irrationally and, on her part, he could have sworn, innocently. And now she would do, what she always did, hold up the progress of the earth and bid it revolve in the opposite direction, and by virtue of what? Ah! that was to him the miraculous joke—by virtue of nothing but her magnificent person. In an ecstasy of recognition he hugged himself, craning his neck above the screen of foliage. And then suddenly, with his still increasing vision of all those white and bronze faces, those muslin dresses and those brilliant turbans, he saw the future and its complications and it made him gasp. She was the same, his huge inspired child, possessed by her Idea, her great and single Idea.

The Idea was harmless enough perhaps in itself. He could imagine it battering for centuries on the walls of unheeding zenanas, wandering forever among the endless sunlit silences of Indian fields, but, wielded by her gigantic charm, it was terribly potent. And with her infallible luck she had chosen the precise time and place at which to appear in order to make the greatest possible sensation.

The whole station was there, and beside the

complete official world of white men, enough Indians to represent that highly educated community who were beginning to arrogate to themselves the powers and responsibilities of their own destiny. Directly opposite was Badri Nath, the editor of the *Hindustan*, a big square man, in a frock coat and white turban. Planted heavily, the toes of his shining boots turned widely outward, he stared before him with an expressionless countenance through a pair of smoked glasses that hid his ponderous soul from the world. Never had Badri Nath been seen without those dark spectacles and never had he been known to smile. The graces of social intercourse he left entirely to his wife. She stood beside him, the dark oval of her proud and perfect face framed in a purple veil, that swept up over her ample bosom and across the crown of her head. She wore few jewels, merely a gold bangle or two on her beautifully moulded arms ; but the little scarlet disc, stamped upon her forehead, gave her, in spite of the perfection of her attire, and the brilliance of her smile, a barbaric, cruel look. Mrs Badri Nath was the most progressive Indian woman in the Punjab. She had spent some years travelling with her

husband, and before her marriage had taken a B.A. at Calcutta, and her Indian sisters looked upon her somewhat askance. Beyond this striking couple, Kashi Ram Choula the ascetic, the prodigal son of the Brahmo-samaj, returned to practise medicine after ten years in Great Britain, stood talking to Bobbie Concannon, the canal-man. Kashi Ram and Concannon were friends. Whenever Concannon was in the station they were to be seen together, the tall morose Indian, with his narrow dark face, and the sun-burned, blue-eyed engineer, one of the most popular men in his service. Kashi Ram seemed to have a fascination for youngsters out from home. Annandale himself had seen them in the Indian's miserable room off the bazaar, a whole group of them, had known them spend half the night there, smoking and listening to their host talk of India, India in the days when Aurungzeb persecuted the Sikhs at Delhi. Kashi Ram, besides being a very clever doctor was a historical genius. He was mad too, quite mad, but his strident rather nasal voice and gleaming eyes and the sneering, blistering vividness of his expressions, had returned to Annandale more than once on his pilgrimages

to ruined cities. Kashi Ram appealed to the professional man in Annandale, to the architect. He was a kind of human symbol of the fiercely mystic, reality-obliterating art of the Hindu; full of incongruities, overburdened with detailed imagery and yet intent on the abstract, the final, the absolute. And all this, his visionary temperament, his orgies of talk and his riots of fancy, seemed to have a weird fascination for youths whose imaginations were suffocated with hard work, whose mouths were muzzled by responsibility. There was, too, just that streak of poetry in Bobbie Concannon that could appreciate the picturesqueness of Kashi Ram's self-sacrifice.

Well, then, here they all were, with Imogen Daunt in the midst of them.

But Annandale's exhilaration was gone in a moment, for when the two women caught sight of one another and swept together, he got a full view of the man accompanying Imogen, and on the instant of recognition received an impression so sinister that he leaped over the flower pots and descended hurriedly into the arena. Susan and Moggie had released one another and were standing in a

perfect halo of delight as he approached ; he heard them :

“ You dear, dreadful child——”

“ Well, I’d no time to let you know.”

“ Anyhow, here you are safe.”

“ And I’ve brought Mr Trotter with me.”

“ Mr who ? ”

“ Mr Trotter. Come here, Trotter.”

Imogen turned with a gesture as though to sweep the burly fantastic little figure along in the bend of her arm, and Annandale, postponing his own greeting for the moment, watched the other’s somewhat grudging obedience. He was absurdly like those pictures of himself that at periodical intervals appeared behind certain public-house windows in Lancashire. His untidy, bushy head, his soft collar and wide-winged necktie were the same, and there was the same suggestion of vanity and brutality on his powerful face that had been noticeable even then, plastered against those plates of glass. But he had been at home there ; while now in his gala attire, he would have seemed to Annandale as he did to the rest of the onlookers, a comic figure, had not the mere fact of his being there assumed such a sinister significance ; had

not Susan Digby frozen into a rigidity that expressed something more akin to horror than mere displeasure.

He advanced with deliberation and dignity, lifting his large flat feet carefully, his tussore coat widely open to show a well-filled scarlet cummerbund, and simultaneously Colonel Digby appeared coming from the opposite side of the circle.

Digby always looked for all the world as though he were just off to shoot wild duck ; and even on this occasion he wore a soft hat pushed back from his high sun-burned forehead, and a loose tweed coat. He was accompanied by a couple of native gentlemen, with whom he was talking jovially when he caught sight of the group in front of him. He stopped. And even as Annandale saw it all, saw the blood rush to his face, saw the same unmistakable scowl that was such a desperate effort at self-control, saw him look hurriedly this way and that, not so much in search of something as avoiding it ; and saw him finally bring his eyes with their terrible expression to his wife's face and keep them there while the disfigurement was washed from his countenance as though healing waters

were being poured over a scar ; even as he beheld it all, he tried to take in the other faces to see if they saw, but he could not tell, there was no time. In another moment Imogen had performed the little ceremony of introduction. With one of her large gestures and with her eyes resting on Benjamin Trotter in adoration, she took the little monster's hand and laid it in that of her host ; and, with that, the circle dissolved.

CHAPTER II

SUSAN DIGBY'S south verandah was a delicious place on a winter morning. Between the festoons of Bouganvillea that hung down from the roof and the rows of chrysanthemums that banked the floor, the sun found its way, warm and welcome to the shelter where long wicker chairs and scarlet cushions tempted to slothfulness. There was an atmosphere, too, of easy-going domesticity about the south verandah. At the far end, the native tailor, cross-legged amid a heap of garments, darned his Sahib's socks dreamily, and beyond the rows of flower-pots two white bullocks plodded round and round in a circle turning the water-wheel that creaked and groaned in long, regular cadences. Now and then a trap rattled in at the gate and stopped just beyond the corner of the house in front of the Colonel's study door, and occasionally Digby's voice would shout for a servant and be answered by a prolonged wail of obedience; for the rest there was only the

cawing of lustful crows over the vegetable garden and the chant of a coolie singing down the road.

Annandale had succumbed to temptation and the "aramkursi" (chair of ease). He had in his hand a pencil with which he now and then made little marks in a book on his knees, but his fiddling with bits of cornice and scraps of columns in his sketch-book, was half-hearted. His mind was busy, delightfully busy, with all the ins and outs of that extraordinary dilemma into which Imogen had plunged them; all the awkwardness of her sudden passion for the Badri Nath and her obstinate faithfulness to Trotter, and her great, complete indifference to the devoted young men who rallied to Susan's aid and tried to distract her from her purpose. But his reverie was interrupted. It always was nowadays.

A round plump little, man in a crisp white shirt and an enormous strawberry-coloured turban, appeared at the edge of the verandah. With his hand to his forehead, he bent low from his rotund middle, then cocking his top-heavy head to one side, blinked and grinned cheerfully through the greenery.

“What is it?” said Annandale in the vernacular, and wondered where he had seen this well-fed humorist before.

“A chitthi for the Miss Sahib, Hazoor.”

“She is not at home, you can leave it with me.”

“The preserver of the poor is kind, but Trotter-Sahib told his servant to wait for an answer.”

“Ah! Trotter-Sahib,” murmured Annandale, “and what’s your name?”

“Gopi Chand, Hazoor.”

There was silence. Annandale dropped his eyes to his book, and Gopi Chand, round and shining, stood in the sunlight motionless, rapt, in a placid trance.

This was the man Trotter had talked about. When he asked for fifteen rupees a month, Trotter had given him thirty. Trotter was an ass. Annandale grunted. He began drawing in his book.

“Chaprassi!” bellowed Digby’s voice from within.

“Go and—” began Annandale looking up, but Gopi Chand had disappeared. “Now where the deuce has he gone?” muttered Annandale

to himself, "he looked as if he were sound asleep."

And then suddenly it came to him, Gopi Chand had been there, in the Digby's house that year they were at Jhilu. His plumpness had been clothed then in a scarlet coat. He had squatted gorgeously before the Colonel's door, and had levied toll upon all unfortunates who desired entrance. Since then he had indeed come down in the world. From the Assistant Resident's head chaprassi to a tourist's servant asking fifteen rupees a month—and yet he looked fat and happy. Strange !

Ah, those days in Jhilu, Annandale sighed to himself. The dear, dreadful ache of those days, when Sue, blooming like a rose in that desert shut in by its sandy hills, had held her husband's future in her slim hands, laughing at the menace of the wilderness. He remembered a terrible dumb struggle one night in somebody's drawing-room, Digby's face apoplectic, terrible ; Sue with white lips, and then her little silvery laugh pouring through them. She had won then and again—he remembered the woman so well, long of limb, dark red hair, slender, soft white cheeks, a pouting mouth, and tired eyes. She reminded

him of Imogen somehow, in retrospect, of Imogen grown old and shorn of her illusions. Sue had won there too in her own wonderful way. The woman's angling for Digby had been clever. Digby had never known how near he'd been to floundering with a hook in his mouth—but she had ended by sitting up with Sue all night when the child died. She adored Sue to this day. Digby—no, he had never known. His mind was too full of famines, and fields, and canals, and aquatic worms. He never saw. On the very brink he would be oblivious. He didn't see Imogen now.

“I want to talk to you,” said Susan in the doorway behind him. He turned, instinctively straightening his necktie, and from his necktie his quite beautiful hand travelled upward to his drooping moustache. Sue's eyes dwelt upon that hand, and a tiny smile touched the very delicately scornful corners of her mouth. Annandale's finely pointed face flushed a little. She came forward as he rose, with that light step of hers that refused fatigue, and sank into a chair deliciously, with a little fling of her thin, loose body back into the cushions. She had a sheaf of letters in her hand, and her irregular

face had gone ivory white as it did when she was tired, and her eyes, which were wide apart and grey between very dark lashes, looked out upon him with indulgent brightness, but that little slightly scornful smile still dwelt on her lips.

Annandale did not mind her smile nor his own discovered vanity. That was all an old story, and between them now there were only mild intolerances and mild enjoyments. What distressed him was the fatigue written on her face, and as she relaxed a moment, he studied her. In her momentary lassitude she looked old, she looked even tragic.

Susan Digby's face was not a disguise. On it all the gladness and the suffering, the light humour and the fierce enthusiasms of her heart, played openly. And her eyes seemed to receive the stranger into her mind and defy him by their utter sweetness to take advantage of his welcome.

"It's about Moggie, of course," she said, sitting up again, straight and alert.

"Of course."

"She's such a dear, and such a child, and such a giant, that I don't know what to do." Susan

crossed her hands under her chin and gazed before her, her brow puckered under the soft hair that she wore very low on her forehead. Her hair was very fine and light like a child's, and its contrast with her dark eyelashes would have made her, thin and pale as she always was of late, a sentimentally interesting person, had it not been for that mocking mouth of hers.

“All the men have fallen in love with her,” she went on. “That’s just as it should be, if she’d only be satisfied with that. But no, that’s not what she wants. Dances and picnics are no good. They won’t swerve her one hair’s breadth from her purpose. She says the Indians are the people she wants to know, and so I’ve taken her to call on every English-speaking Hindoo and Mohammedan lady in the place, and, would you believe it? that’s not enough. She must know the men too. Why not? She sat in Mrs Dost Mohammed’s drawing-room and asked that dainty little zenana lady to introduce her husband and brothers. Again, why not? There’s nothing to say to her. There’s no answer that she can’t pull to shreds in two minutes. I believe if I told her we were afraid of her bring-

ing down a mutiny about our ears, she'd say, "So much the better." And the worst of it is that if the Colonel refuses her, she'll go off with Trotter. Isn't it appalling ? "

"What will Trotter do ? "

"He'll take her to stay with the Badri Naths, and she'll eat their food and get enteric, and wear outrageous low-neck gowns. No, we must keep her here. Besides, I love her. I can't let her be ruined by the Badri Naths."

"Can't you explain them to her ? "

"She won't listen to mere suppositions, and, of course, I can't prove anything. Mrs Badri Nath has quite fascinated her already, and has asked her to address the Indian Ladies' Association, and she will. And heaven only knows what she'll say ! "

"Forbid it."

"If I do, much as she loves me, she'll go off. She feels she's got a mission to these people, and she'd throw me or anybody over for her Idea."

"If she fell in love ? "

"Safe, if she only would."

"Concannon ? "

"No. Absolutely no chance. He's not queer

enough. She must have something to worship, a hero, or a monster like Trotter."

"But you don't think——?"

"No. She's devoted to him, but it's the disciple and master sort of thing."

There was silence.

"Do you consider him dangerous?" asked Annandale at last.

Susan brought her clear eyes to his face slowly.

"Yes," she said seriously, "I do, because my husband hates him so. George never hates any harmless creature. He makes light of him, called him when he was a Labour Member 'the fly on the elephant's trunk,' but he really hates him. You saw how it was that first day. They've run up against one another before, at home somewhere. But it's not just a personal grudge. There's something more."

"It's the deuce having him come to the house all the time."

"Yes, you know I can't help thinking he wouldn't keep on, if he didn't have some other motive than just Moggie; we freeze him so. The poor child gets in a frightful state over that,

but I can't help it. He makes me—" She stretched out her hands and crooked her fingers backward. "And yet you know, with all his vulgarity, and his outlandishness, one can't despise him. He's got a kind of power."

"His eye is quite mad and he never listens to anything anybody says. That's a bad sign. He doesn't want to know."

"Perish the thought. He knows everything already." Susan rose and walked to the end of the verandah. "I wonder who George has got in his study. I really must interrupt him a minute." She disappeared. In two minutes she was back again, her face a mixture of amusement and concern.

"Who was it?" asked Annandale. She paused before him mysteriously.

"It was Gopi Chand."

He started to his feet, staring at her hard.

"Gopi Chand! but he brought a letter an hour ago."

"Did he?" she murmured absently.

Light began to dawn on him.

"Who is this Gopi Chand?" he brought out at last.

“ Ah ! my dear, don't you know ? ” And then she laughed at the look of him and caught her breath. “ It's quite exciting,” she threw back as she drifted into the house.

CHAPTER III

MRS DIGBY, besides her succession of very well-cooked and well-behaved official dinners, gave, every now and then, when she could stand being the first lady of the station no longer, unless she let off steam somehow, what she was pleased to call a party. A party was well cooked too and not ill-behaved, but it was selected on quite a different principle from a dinner, and its special quality was talk. When Mrs Digby wanted to have a fling, she had it in talk. Her weakness for good talk would some day, she vowed herself, be the ruin of her. She could forgive anybody anything, if he would only *say* something.

When one was invited to a "party" one's particularly nice sensation of tickled vanity was chastened with a mixture of apprehension. One was always up against the fear of proving too stupid to be asked again, and one never knew whom one might meet there, nor how many of one's pet prejudices were to be the butt of those somewhat intimidating wits

that Mrs Digby, when entertaining "on her own," gathered about her.

Annandale, who became suddenly conscious on these occasions of a dozen self-betraying foibles, of as many carefully hidden old-maidish pruderies and tastes, and of his own grey-haired, attenuated, inefficient social presence generally, always begged to be tucked away in the middle of the table somewhere between two good buffers who would receive all the shocks for him, and leave him free to watch. And gratefully, on this particular evening, he found himself between Macpherson, the Traffic Manager of the Railway, and Shalieb, the explorer who had just come down from Kafistan. Macpherson was sandy and bristly and "Glesca," with a tendency to talk loud and turn the letter "r" into a word by itself. Shalieb was small, with the skin peeling off his nose, and bright little eyes peering cheerfully through spectacles, and a soft high voice, making itself heard quite quietly. Then there was Concannon, of course, who was living in a tent in the Digbys' Compound, and a sapper man, and Kashi Ram Choula, and Mr Trotter. Kashi Ram and Trotter were both triumphs for Susan. In the first case,

over the Indian doctor's own pride and diffidence, that seldom allowed him to dine with even those few civilians who asked him, and in the second case, over the colonel's violent aversion to the man Trotter. Susan had argued in the latter case that Trotter was there and must be recognized as a fact, and that it was far safer to have him in the house than luring Moggie to all sorts of outlandish "rendezvous." Digby had given in with a grumble or two about being suspect already, and about dying for a sheep as well as a lamb. Anyhow, Trotter was there, rather tightly stuffed into a dinner jacket and talking in his ponderous, driving way about how he wanted to know, not whether the Government was a good Government, but whether the Indians liked it.

Besides Susan and Imogen, there was only one other woman, a Mrs Trueman of the Zenana Mission, who, to Annandale, always seemed the last word in Susan's erratic and fastidious spirit of democracy. Mrs Trueman was the widow of a cotton merchant and for years had lived in a neglected bungalow in the Temple Road, that backed up against a dreary little moth-eaten place, a cluster of filthy

native Christian hovels called the Kerani Mohalla. Annandale connected her always with disreputable Indian Christians. She got the leakage from all the other missions, he knew. At the back of her compound was a row of servants' hovels that she used to house broken-down old women, and, in the front, her horse, a very long, bony specimen was let out to graze on the lawn. There was an air of desolation about that blistered garden, and yet Mrs Trueman was—he had to admit—a most entertaining person. Her withered face was as bright as a polished coin, and her jerky, emphatic voice rapped out quite delicious drolleries, and, anyhow, Susan Digby loved her.

“She’s often taken for the Burra Memsahib, you know,” said that lady, leaning towards Annandale and nodding across from him to his *vis-à-vis*. Mrs Trueman laughed in her rather spasmodic sparkling way. “Like a poor Eurasian woman, who came to me the other day. She was bragging about her social position and how much of a sahib her husband was.

“And do you know,” she said to me, “he’s sometimes taken for an Englishman at night.” She laughed again.

“How do you like that, Moggie?” the Colonel was saying from the other end of the double row of red candles, where he was enjoying his dinner and ragging Imogen, who, in red velvet, with a necklace of garnets around her rather heavy neck, was looking particularly barbaric. “Here’s Shalieb, met a lady on the top of the Himalayas who had four husbands.”

“How splendid! I must put that in a speech. What was she like?”

Shalieb looked at the girl over his spectacles, his eyebrows cocked crookedly.

“Not unlike you, my dear,” he said, in his gentle, contemplative voice.

There was a shout. “My dear man,” roared Digby, “you’ve said something. My wife will love you for ever.”

“But I intend to interview all the leading Indians in the Punjab,” pursued Trotter’s monotone, “and visit the villages and canal-works, etcetera.”

Annandale turned to Shalieb. “Did you find anything nice this time?”

“Ach, yes. Some specimens of Tibetan pictures, silk, such detail, such colour, such depravity, wunderschön.” He was started.

Annandale went on quite happily through the game and sweet, listening to him. He was a child, an enthusiast, without moral sense; with no sense at all, except his feeling for his "hinterland." He was delicious, and mad, and comical. The stream of talk, that had flowed on across their heads, presently broke.

Susan had set Macpherson and Trotter at each other about coolie labour and the cost of rail-roading. Macpherson was getting hot. He brought his fist down on the table with a bang.

"Man alive! you don't know what you're talking about. There's British labour, and there's Italian labour, and there's the Spanish South American stuff they call labour, and I've had to do with them all, and I tell you, there's no labour under the sun so wasteful, so feeble, so runnin' away with money and time and the soul of industry, as the coolie labour that we've got to do with here. It takes a thousand coolies a month to do what it would take a gang of fifty Italians to do in a week. What's the matter with 'em? Their almighty transmigration of souls is the matter with 'em, and their enlarged spleens, and their sun-baked heads. India's the matter with 'em. Just when you're gettin'

on fine, cholera breaks out, or plague, or just malaria, and the whole caboodle clears out. Phwt! Just like that. You get up in the morning expecting to see the works, bridge, or incline or something, swarming like an anthill, and it's empty, forsaken, dead as a door nail."

Macpherson stopped, and there was silence. Every one at the table had abandoned conversation for the moment and Trotter had the field.

"You say India's the matter with them," he began slowly, dropping his words heavily into their midst. "And what I want to know is, what is the matter with India?" He paused and stared from one to another, his keen eyes visiting each face in turn, and each turned him off smiling a little, assuming the blank face of a fool, as well-bred Englishmen do when they want to avoid trouble; until he came back to the man opposite him.

Kashi Ram's long, dark face, expressing little in the way of feeling at any time, was, in spite of his mental vigour, a mask. Upon his narrow brow, heavy nose, and compressed curving lips, there rested always in repose the immobility of the Oriental, and the range of this expression, even when he talked, was small. Indeed, it

seemed to those who knew him best as if he had only one expression, a kind of sneering, fiery contempt, that grew more and more intense as he grew more and more interested, until it finally withered even itself up, and, burning into his eyes, left him, in his wildest moments, with a face of absolute calm. He stared now at Trotter with that fiery sneer plainly marked upon his face, and his eyes beginning already to battle with it for supremacy.

"I want to know," began Trotter again, speaking straight to him this time, "whether the British Government knows any more than I do what is the matter with India? It presumes to prescribe for the Indians as though they were sick children. And does it know whether the medicine's doing any good, or whether the children are really sick at all? Maybe it's doing just the worst thing for the patient. Maybe the patient is no patient at all, but—a prisoner."

There was a silence around the table and a moving of chairs. Digby motioned to a servant and lit a cigar. Susan, looking down the table at Moggie, stayed in her place.

"There is only one thing you can do for us,"

brought out Kashi Ram in his compressed voice, that always sounded as though he were keeping back a thousand words to the ten he spoke.

“And what’s that?” demanded Trotter, leaning forward, his bushy head lit up grotesquely by the many near candles.

Kashi Ram took his time. He pushed back his chair, rammed his hands into his pockets, and threw back his head until he was staring high above his opponent’s head. His attitude recalled distinctly to Annandale a supper at Oxford; a crowd of students; figures flitting by in the quadrangle outside; the smell of leather and damp charred wood.

“There was once a very old woman,” he began, while the scarlet-coated servants moved about silently, clearing the table of everything but cigars and wine; “and the old woman used to make baskets of straw, sitting in the door of her house in the city. She had made baskets all her life, but her hands were stiff now, and her eyes were blurred. One day a little boy came running by, and he stopped in front of the old woman, watched her a moment, and then said, ‘Look here, old mother; give that basket to me. I’ll show you how to do it. I learned to-

day in school." And the old woman looked up at him through her blurred old eyes and laughed, for, though her basket was not good, still, she had made baskets all her life." He paused.

"Well, what then?" burst out Imogen impatiently from the other end of the table.

"Nothing," said the Indian. "That's all."

"But surely——"

He brought his eyes to her across the candle-light and rose from his chair, his high, narrow shoulders hunched together, his dark face in shadow.

"You can teach us nothing," he flung out at them; "we have not known before you were born. You learned yesterday in school to build railroads and schools; to form governments and inaugurate eras, but we have been writing the history of your governments and your eras over and over again. You laugh at those of us who say that we have flying machines in the Vedas, and perhaps that is absurd. But *we have them all*; the things you would give us, from your ideals of socialistic government to your pleasure resorts, with their Monte Carlos. We have had them all and worn them all out, gambling rooms and Turkish baths, and national theatres;

communal ownership of the land, and government by referendum. There is nothing you can teach us. We are too wise already. Wise with the weary, fruitless wisdom of old-age. But there is one thing you can do. You are young and we are old, and you can renew our hearts."

There was dead silence. Mrs Trueman was sitting with her eyes fixed on his face. Slowly she nodded her little erect head in assent. Imogen moved her broad shoulders impatiently. "How?" she asked at last, blowing a long cloud of smoke through her full lips, and staring at him through narrowed eyes.

"By loving us," he said shortly. His voice sounded harsh and nasal and terribly compressed and then, when Imogen laughed, he turned suddenly as though stung. "Why not?" he burst out at her, his face absolutely motionless and his eyes burning. "It's all the young can ever do for the old." And then he turned, taking them all in and speaking at last to Mrs Digby. "You mistake us and what we are, and what we want. We do not want your western education. We do not want your trained armies, nor your emancipated women, nor your business men. We are not the people of the Lion, or the

Eagle, or the Dragon. We are the people of the Cow—yes, the Cow. India is the country of the village, and the people of India are villagers, and the Cow is the sacred animal of India. Tell me, do you think that means nothing? Do you, who come to educate us, and raise up armies, and build our cities, and inflame our idle rich; do you think you can really change us? Are you so young as that? Go into the bazaar and see our sacred animal meandering unmolested among the food shops, munching and dreaming; peaceful, mild, milk-giving cow; emblem of agriculture and quiet friendliness, and the sacredness of the feminine element. But no, you won't see. You stuff us with economics and Shakespeare, with ambition and lust. You come to us with your bare-faced materialism and your bare-faced sexual equality, and we—some of us—are light-headed enough to imitate you. You build your clubs outside our cities and you carry on your carousals there, during which we serve you food and wine. You grasp your women round their waists and swing them about to the time of rapid music, and we watched you and at first thought you beasts, but after

awhile we found you only mad. But however we found you, we could not get free of you again, for the same thing that is the matter with you is the matter with us, and that is sin."

"Yes, yes!" burst out Mrs Trueman, as he stopped. "You are absolutely right."

"But, my dear people," murmured Imogen, leaning over the table, "what a funny thing to say. There's no such thing. It's just a word."

Mrs Trueman looked at her, astonished.

"You really mean that? Well, you just come with me and I'll show you."

"But what do you mean by sin, Truey dear? put in Susan.

"Why just sin, of course, there's no other word for it."

"Doing what you jolly well know is wrong," offered Concannon.

"But," objected Moggie again, "no one would do wrong if they really knew it was wrong."

"Wouldn't they though? If they wanted something that belonged to somebody else, and wanted it bad enough, what would happen?"

"Well, lots of things might happen. That's no case at all. It all depends. But if a man

were perfectly healthy and had had enough to eat, he wouldn't want somebody's else's cake. It's only diseased appetites that make people steal when they've got enough. Government ought to see that each man had enough and the doctors should see that each is healthy."

"Hear, hear!" shouted the Colonel.

Susan rose and moved towards the door.

"My dear child, my dear child," murmured Mrs Trueman to Imogen as they followed her.

At the door, however, Imogen turned to Choula, who was still standing, "But what do you really mean?" she asked.

"I mean just that," he answered, not looking at her, "there are only two really great things in the world, sin and suffering, and the difference between your Christian world and our Hindu world is this: we say, and have said for centuries, that suffering is the great evil and sin the cause of it. Your Christ has said: "Sin is the great evil and suffering is the way of escape." Now, if you go back to saying that sin is nothing but the result of disease, you get back to where we've been for a million years."

Imogen was thinking hard. At last she smiled. "I don't know what you mean, but I

don't agree, anyhow." And with that she was gone.

"But you've given us not a single fact," observed Trotter, as Kashi Ram came back to the table.

It was only then that Shalieb raised his gentle voice and said, strangely enough, just what Mrs Trueman had said to Moggie.

"You come with me." He nodded brightly at Trotter through his spectacles. "I will show you ; come with me—beyond—anyway, you see my curios. They will teach you. You will see the serpent there, and the disease of sin. Is it not so, Choula ? The young lady would have them all healthy. How can that be ? Their religion itself is so sick, so sexual. You come ! I show you." He nodded brightly.

"And I for one," said Digby, "believe in that old boy, the Devil. In fact, you know, I've met him."

And this time it was Trotter who laughed.

CHAPTER IV

THE lunch table was set in the garden, and Imogen was there, forestalling the meal. She sat in a low chair under the branches of a pipal tree, eating a banana; a plate of skins, on the ground beside her told of fruit already departed through those beautiful red lips. Sunlight filtering through the leaves overhead dappled the pearly tint of her white gown with gold. She waved the remaining half banana in welcome.

“Isn’t it delicious out here? I wish I had a lover.”

“The place swarms,” Annandale sank into a chair.

“I don’t mean someone to love me, someone for me to be in love with.”

“Can’t you—just like that?” He waved a slender hand.

“No—I can’t—just like that.” She laughed. Her face was very young and lovely when she laughed, and the little pools of light in her eyes

caused one to forget the sensuality that dwelt on her face in times of idleness. Activity, of any kind, always rescued her he thought, watching. It was the instinct of health and self-preservation that drove her on—but she didn't know, thank goodness. She was like Digby, unconscious, unanalytical.

“Bobbie asked me if he might love me,” she was saying.

“And you?”

“I said of course—that it would do him good. He said he didn't understand me, but didn't care, adored me anyhow, that's not what I want.”

“No, of course not. It's not flattering enough.”

“What do you mean?”

“Nothing. Do you still sing grand opera with one finger on the piano, hours and hours of it?”

She stretched, like an animal about to go to sleep for the winter.

“How funny you are. I love to sing though I can't a bit. He lets out things—I'm so sleepy now.” Her eyes closed.

“Have forty winks,” he lighted a cigarette.

There was no answer; she had dropped off.

“Great Scott!” he murmured half aloud. “How very, very wonderful. There’s not an atom of vanity in her,” he added to himself and wandered off through the flowering hibiscus bushes toward the tennis courts. It seemed, somehow, indecent to stay and study her face, heavy and exposed in sleep. The gardeners were marking out the tennis courts, three side by side on a large square of turf, surrounded by scarlet poinsettia and beyond in the vegetable garden a small urchin was waving ragged arms to the sky and making weird noises at intervals. He was hired to scare away the birds. Sue and Bobbie were at the horse-show. Digby should be visible by now.

The screen door of the Colonel’s study was open. A servant in a red coat dozed on the verandah, his turbaned head fallen forward on his chest. The sight was strange. It was five minutes to two. Sue would be back any moment. He wandered round the corner of the verandah again, toward Imogen and the lunch table.

He stopped; and why did he stop, he asked himself peevishly ? ”

Imogen was still asleep under the lovely quivering shadow of the tree, and Digby stood watching her. His back was toward Annandale but something about the crook of his arms suggested that he was filling his pipe. A little tremulous wind stirred the leaves, and a patch of light moved along the cushion behind Imogen's head and crept over her eyes. She moved. The white petals of a flower dropped from the creeper clad branches into her lap. The Colonel remained motionless. She opened her eyes and smiled, blinking through the sun, and sat up.

"Put your topi on," Digby was saying as Annandale joined them. Sue's trap turned in at the gate.

It was while they were at lunch that Samuel announced a Babu, from the country, for the Canal-Sahib. Somehow that bare announcement had dropped as a discord into their festive quintette ; perhaps merely because of Samuel's habitual mournfulness, there was always a pleading dumb look in his dog-like eyes ; but it seemed to Annandale that Concannon's open face, too, had taken on a sudden look of apprehension.

Imogen had awakened marvellously, with an unimpaired appetite for chicken curry and damson tart, and had been entertaining them with reminiscences of her suffrage campaign. She had bagged the Colonel's motor that morning, and, on fire with the joys of being one's own chauffeur, was telling of how she had fled from the police in her motor six months before in London.

"I let her have it and went through Brentford at a good forty-five miles an hour. It was six o'clock on a Saturday night and all the busy mothers with their rickety babies were out marketing for Sunday. I kept one foot on the siren and drove into the mob, and I got to Virginia Water from Clement's Inn, in less than an hour, number on the back awfully muddy, you know."

"What did they want you for?" asked Con-cannon watching his alarming modern goddess in bewildered rapture.

"Pouring honey into a pillar-box."

"Nasty, sticky mess."

"Exactly, I just happened to have a bottle with me. We were to have had it for tea. I rather hated missing it."

Digby had snorted with laughter suddenly and Samuel had had to cough three times behind his Master's back before he could make known his message.

Digby had insisted then on having the strange babu brought into the presence of the lunch table. He came, scraping repeatedly, bringing himself to a standstill some yards away, his hands together in an attitude of supplication, and carrying with his dustiness and his weariness an atmosphere incongruous and gloomy. He was a Mohammedan, with a beard dyed red, and his fine, rather battered countenance wore a look of extreme mournfulness.

In answer to an abrupt inquiry from Concannon, given in such a savage tone that Imogen looked at her rejected lover in astonishment, he burst into a torrent of Urdu. Annandale caught the word "Patwari" repeatedly, and something about plague, and the great fear of the people. The faces of Digby and Concannon were expressionless as they listened. They kept their eyes on the table. When the stream of words had spent itself, Concannon spoke slowly and shortly, looking hard at the man.

“This is no news to me, Babu-ji, and it is an evil thing that you have done. You have left the place in which I put you. It is not good. Begone now to the Doctor Sahib in the Jul-lunder Bazaar, Kashi Ram, the one who came to the plague camp last cold weather. Tell him the story of the plague.”

The man backed away.

“One lump or two ? ” said Susan, pouring out the coffee.

“One thanks.” And as the man disappeared, Concannon’s brow cleared.

But in spite of Susan’s matter-of-fact handling of the coffee cups, the pleasure and comfort of the lunch table had departed. There was a silence. One of the crows, which had been screaming in the tree tops, shot down suddenly upon the side table and was off again with a piece of bread in its beak.

“I’ll have to sack him, or dock his pay, and he’s the best man I’ve got ; ” muttered Concannon.

“But why ? ” said Imogen. “What has he done ? ”

“He’s played hookey. Wanted to have a good old chin-wag with some of his pals in the

city, and used this plague business as an excuse. Don't you think so, Digby ? ”

Digby grunted and lit a cigar. His face was inscrutable.

“ There's always some kind of trouble in Hazratpur district,” murmured Susan.

“ Hazratpur,” repeated Imogen. “ Hazratpur, oh yes, I know, that's where Trotter's going.” And immediately she flushed crimson.

Annandale could have sworn that Digby gave a start, but that large comfortable individual gave a long puff at his cigar before he spoke. His eyes rested on his wife.

“ You must be wrong. There's nothing to see,” he said stolidly.

Imogen's flush had faded. She looked at Digby intently.

“ Doubtless I am,” she said, rising to her feet. “ If you're going to see Dr Choula, I must go too,” she added, as she turned towards the house.

Susan had risen, questioning her husband with her eyes, but he gave no sign, so she followed Moggie.

Annandale waited, half expecting to be dismissed himself, but, as they disappeared, Digby turned to him.

“ There’s something in this Hazratpur business. I want someone to go out with Concannon to watch. There are some ruins out there. Can’t you go and mug about in them a bit ? ”

“ Yes, I could if——”

“ If what ? ”

“ If it’s serious. You know I’ve got this museum under way.”

Digby, his legs stretched out under the table, hands deep in his pockets, stared into his coffee cup.

“ Well,” he rumbled, in that rather throaty bass of his, “ it may be all ‘ my-eye.’ Trotter is, in my opinion, a fathead. If he is meddling with the Badri Nath lot, he doesn’t know what he’s in for ; but any fool can light a match, and there’s a lot of firewood rotting in the sun out there. Eh, Concannon ? ”

“ It’s the deuce among my patrols, I know that.”

Annandale, looking from one to the other, felt suddenly small and insignificant, and his beautiful museum and his precious plans faded into nothingness. Always had he viewed the real battlings, that went on in the plains of India, from a distance. He knew, of course, all

the time, that there were places where blue-eyed youngsters from little ivy-grown English villages, sweated in the sun among a million coolies with never a white man, for months at a time, to speak to, subjected every day of their lives to the temptations of bribery, and slothfulness, and despair. He had come on a canal-bungalow, every now and then in his wanderings, destitute of comforts ; surrounded by desert ; the very monument of loneliness ; and yet, somehow, in his very pleasant flat in Bombay, with his wonderful visions in his mind and his splendid creations before his eyes, he had almost forgotten that Bombay, the beautiful, the mistress of his heart, was not India. Now, looking into the face of Bobbie Concannon, he seemed to see there, behind that glorious stoicism of the British youth, a kind of image of the madness that swept over those desert fields, and a great pity for the boy swept over him, making him feel young and foolish.

“ I say, it would be jolly to have you,” said the boy.

“ Right-O,” was all Annandale managed to say.

CHAPTER V

THE Darya Darwasa, Gate of the River, is old, very old. Of all the twelve gates that pierce the city wall it is farthest from the railway station, where shunting engines and battered houses of ill-repute, and a skating rink with a corrugated iron roof, mark progress; and nearest to the river, where bathing ghats and shrines to Shiva still call the women of India to their ancient obsequies; and still there clings to its mouldy brick work remnants of blue tiles, of that wonderful blue that is a long forgotten art now.

Outside the Darya Darwasa, where the crowded stalls of the fruit market stagger under the blazing sun; where barbers squat on either side of the thoroughfare, shaving and clipping and anointing heads with oil; where women and children pass on their way to bathe in gentle, laughing groups; there is always a crowd, and a riot of colour, and the vague mingled uproar of voices and wheels, and temple bells and bleating

sheep ; but on the other side of that dark entrance is sudden shadow and quiet.

Kashi Ram Choula's dispensary was fifteen minutes walk through tortuous alleys that crawled inward from the gate. One left one's trap outside in the lee of the wall, and passing through the gate went on along a narrow bazaar at the end of which a crooked pipal tree, growing out of a shrine, pointed the way with dusty decrepit branches.

"How simply ripping," said Imogen, gazing about her. Sunlight dropped down from the narrow slit of sky that appeared between the mysterious towering houses, so dilapidated and so unpenetrable, leaning against one another fast asleep, and drew a sharp line along the ground where purple shadow followed the irregular shape of jutting shops and receding doorways. A drowsy shop-keeper brooded cross-legged in his booth. A couple of donkeys laden with bricks meandered by, under the lazy prodding of a naked urchin. The air was stagnant and heavy with the odours from open drains.

Imogen and Annandale and Concannon were on their way to the dispensary. Dr Choula had offered them tea on his roof-top and Imogen had

accepted with enthusiasm. They had come straight from the polo match.

"And do you mean to say," Imogen asked, with her eyes fixed on a screened balcony, crudely carved and worm-eaten, that bulged from a house opposite; "that women are shut up in those filthy rooms, behind those suffocating peepholes? It's an outrage."

"Oh, I say, you know," ventured Concannon, "it's no good getting worked up over these bally zenanas. Why, they like it."

Imogen glared, flushing gorgeously.

"I don't believe it. And if they do—then they should be made to hate it." She flung out her arms. "I couldn't breathe in it."

Annandale lagged behind to get the full effect of her against that close, crowded, oriental background. She made it all look trivial, and dingy, and unreal. The little jutting mouths of shops crammed with trifles, the fringe of desultory buyers and more desultory beggars, the rat-like donkeys with their huge loads, the dirty, sticky babies playing in the drains; all were dwarfed, all seemed rather poor properties jumbled together on a stage too small for her, in a scene utterly incongruous.

And, with her usual indifference to picturesque and curious effects, she was already paying no attention to what was going on about her. A Mohammedan woman in a burkha brushed by her like a moth, turning her hooded head to look after her. Shopkeepers stared, and a string of children followed at a little distance ; but she was talking to Concannon and did not notice. He had started her off and she was letting him have it, and gradually Annandale could see that he was succumbing as they all succumbed, not so much to her deadly logic or to the convincing truth of her statements, as to the extraordinary mental, moral, and physical pressure that she packed into her words. As Annandale drew up with them, Bobbie was saying : " Oh, no ! I don't mean that. I can't explain what I do mean. You may be right." There was a worried expression on his face.

Kashi Ram was discovered in white overalls, painting the throat of a bearded ruffian in a velvet jacket and voluminous trousers. He signed to them to come in, waving his brush towards a wooden bench along the wall of the dispensary, and dived again down the Afghan's throat. Half a dozen miserable beings crouched

upon the floor showing soiled bandages through their ragged garments. A woman, ghastly pale, with an infant in her arms, leaned against the wall, her eyes closed. So still she was and so ashen, that she seemed to have died there, waiting. Next to her sprawled a man with a great open sore on his leg, on which flies gathered undisturbed. Flies, indeed, swarmed everywhere, and everywhere was dust, for the room was directly on the bazaar and the only light came through the open doorway, where a group of ever-shifting loiterers hung watching with great stupid eyes.

Kashi Ram spoke to the guests over his shoulder.

“Mohammed, Gift of the Prophet has just brought a hundred camels down the Khyber. He’s one of the worst cut-throats of his tribe, but I saved his child’s life once, when I was on the frontier.”

The Afghan, his throat attended to, fumbled clumsily in the folds of his massive clothing and produced a heavy silver ring which he tendered the Doctor. Kashi Ram held the fee in his hand and the other, bowing low, lumbered out through the knot of spec-

tators, an inscrutable look on his heavy dare-devil face.

The Doctor turned, smiling sardonically. His long dark face wore its habitual look, but there was a kind of defiant affection in his voice.

“He’s robbed my house more than once.” “From Kabul,” he added, tossing the ring to Annandale.

Imogen had looked about her on entering in a fury of surprise, and Annandale, watching her face, remembered suddenly how it had struck him at first, the bare wooden bench, the battered table crowded with bottles, the pan of instruments simmering over a jar of burning charcoal, the poverty of the room, the crudeness of the disordered equipment, the deadly lassitude and filth of the patients, and the sickly odour of unwashed bodies. He remembered one morning when he had called on her in the London hospital, where she was studying. She had taken him through those spotless wards of hers, and had talked with him about going to India to practise. That had been before she had switched off on to this modern craze for Eugenics. What if she had come? Would she, with that great young arm of hers, have scrubbed out the whole of

the city, all those hundreds of dark, noisome houses ?

Kashi Ram was bending over the woman and child who sat against the wall. With a great effort the mother opened her eyes and stared at him. He said something in a low tone. She moved a little, relaxing her arms, and he took the baby from them very gently, lifted it and carried it to the light, where it lay in his sure hands, a shrivelled, deformed little scrap of naked humanity, blinking up into his dark, morose face.

From the street another woman, with a fat child on her hip, stared in at the doctor with an apathetic face, adjusting her breast to her child's groping mouth.

Imogen had gone quite white, and as the Doctor brought the infant back and laid it in the mother's weak arms, she jumped to her feet.

"She has no milk," he said by way of explanation, "the child will starve."

"Give it to me. I will feed it with a bottle."

Kashi Ram smiled.

"You can't."

"Why not ?"

“The woman wouldn’t let you. And if you did and the child died, you would have killed it.”

“But—I could go to her and teach her to do it.”

“Yes—you could—but she could not buy the milk. She has no money.”

“No money for a little milk ! ”

“No.”

“But surely——”

Kashi Ram frowned impatiently.

“Her husband is a sweeper. He gets seven rupees a month. In ten years she has had six children. Three have died—luckily.”

He had been preparing a packet of medicine while he spoke, and now turned to help the woman to her feet. At the door Annandale heard him say in Hindustani.

“Do not come again, sister. The way is long and the medicine will do all that I can do.”

And then she tottered out alone, dragging her weary, uncertain feet very, very slowly through the dust.

Imogen stood staring out of the door.

“She’s one of thousands,” he said shortly, in his biting repressed tone. “And now will you

come up to my study? My assistant will do these dressings."

The study, at the top of a narrow dark stair, had a window above the bazaar, and a wide doorway on to a flat square of roof, where some primroses and pansies in flower pots, and a table with a white tea-cloth and blue tea-cups, showed against a background of narrow towering houses. Other roofs, square like this one, looked down upon it from differing heights, and through a gap in the buildings, the white minarets of a mosque rose, wonderfully slender and unsubstantial against the shining, depthless sky.

The sun was still hot, and Dr Choula pulled forward some chairs, and somewhat awkwardly begged his guests to be seated. As they sat down in his strange medley of a room, amid his hundreds of battered books and his photographs of English cricket teams, and his arrays of bronze Buddhas and bits of wood and bits of brass and bits of ivory, all going to make up a confusion no less striking than the chaos of bottles downstairs, Annandale watched Imogen curiously. Strangely enough, lounging moodily in the window and staring from under those dramatic eyebrows of hers, she fitted in. Her bronze

gown and the heavy ropes of hair coiled under her veil, and the dangling topaz ear-rings, gave her an antique barbaric look. It was amusing the way this dingy ornate background changed her.

And he liked her so, better than he had liked her at the polo match, smoking cigarettes and flirting in her rather obvious way with first one and then another poor human. There was something almost coarse about her there. Her attraction was so incontestible, her self-assurance so undisguised. Bobbie, of course, was blind, but he, Annandale was not blind. He had to acknowledge that the appeal of her was coarsened. Her youth was going, and it had been her youth that had stood out to society as the pledge of that real innocence of hers. No one would believe it now. The only thing left to save her was her desperate mental seriousness. And she was most intensely serious here, face to face with Choula, the fierce idealist. His talk was already obliterating the insolence on her face.

Annandale wandered out on to the roof, and leaning against the wall, took out his sketch book. Two women in saffron saris came to the edge of a neighbouring roof, and peered down at

him, laughing like children, dodging back, and peeping again through the lace work of masonry that surrounded their perch. The white minarets of the mosque quivered against the deepening gold of the afternoon sky. He began to draw.

"But what I want to know," said Imogen's voice behind him, half an hour later, "is why you don't do something consistent." She came out on to the roof and stood staring into the golden haze. "Why don't you work at a big scheme that will get at the root of things?"

Their host put a brown china tea pot on the table and pulled up a rather rickety chair. Concannon came bringing two more.

Imogen looked at the Indian questioningly, with undisguised criticism in her gaze.

"It's no good," he said doling out napkins and plates.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I've tried."

"What have you tried?"

"Jolly well everything," put in Concannon. "You just ought to have heard about some of his schemes. Nothing short of a social revolution was to come off that first year."

“Yes,” muttered Choula, “and the only revolution that came off, came off right here in my own mind.”

He gulped down some tea and laughed, and got up and walked across the roof and back again, his shoulders bent, his hands in his pockets.

“India was too much for me. I sprang out of the ancient dust-heap and my early perceptions were clouded by the weariness and vice, and by the distorted visions of my people. I spent ten years in Scotland and England and America. I came back, I had had an enormous hypodermic injection of the strychnine of the west. I came back to revolutionize India and I came a fearful cropper. Before I could bring anything to pass, the strychnine had worn off. Then I loathed my own people. I hated my own home. I couldn’t eat their food, or breathe their air, or think their thoughts.”

He paused, looking from one to another, his head bent, his eyes restlessly searching their faces for understanding.

“For a while I fought, then I began to succumb. The weariness came creeping over me, the same eternal, vicious weariness. It lies like a pall over the children of India. It had power over

me. If it hadn't been for my friends—I don't know—I would have gone under. No creed, no ambition is any good. Buddhism and Hinduism and Christianity, I knew them all but they wouldn't last. They can't last in India. They all become depraved. Only my friends lasted. Only people's hearts are of any use." He laughed again bringing himself up short. "I back that boy Concannon against all the creeds and faiths of India."

Imogen was sitting forward, her head resting on her hands.

"You are chaotic. You don't get anywhere," she said at last. "What is life then. And if there's no good in planning revolutions, what is one to do?"

Bobbie chuckled. "Great Scott! is there nothing on earth worth having except revolutions?"

"Nothing worth working for."

Kashi Ram stared away from her.

"Life is just a succession of infinitely small acts, as a day is a succession of minutes, and a minute is a succession of seconds. There are never any great deeds done, only little acts."

They all sat a while in silence.

A bell sounded from a near by temple, clear and soft and monotonous, once, twice, three times.

"You sound perfectly hopeless," said Imogen after a while.

"Do I? Well you've got to begin there, if you're to do anything in India, but, of course, it takes a long, long time. One's whole life, and then, perhaps, there will be nothing to show."

"But what can you do beginning there? What is left?"

"Toil."

She moved impatiently.

"No, no. Don't talk like that." She rose, straightening her shoulders. "I can't bear that word," she added, facing the Indian unwillingly.

"It's not a word. Ask Bobbie. Ask Mrs Trueman."

Imogen looked at Bobbie Concannon a moment, contemplatively.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Mr Concannon's not doing anything for the people of India. Are you?"

Concannon laughed.

"Not a blessed thing, just my everlasting, God forsaken, beastly duty."

"Duty," burst out Imogen, "duty! horrible

word. We ought never to do anything from a sense of duty."

"Go tell that to my boss."

But she had turned again to Kashi Ram.

"What we want is inspiration, not duty. Don't you think so?"

It was then, that it seemed to Annandale as if the Indian, in a way, flung her off.

"Go and find out from Mrs Trueman," he growled. And turning his back on her, left her to go into the house with Concannon to find her gloves and parasol.

Annandale arranged with him then to go the next day to visit their temple, and when he followed into the house the others had gone. He found them waiting in the street.

"No, only three waltzes to-night," Imogen was saying to Bobbie.

Their host was bowing stiffly from his doorway.

CHAPTER VI

BOBBIE CONCANNON had gone off that same night, after the ball, on his motor-bicycle, looking so down in the mouth as he bade good-bye to Susan and Moggie by the light of the watchman's lantern, that Annandale had almost given up his projected trip with Kashi Ram on the spot. The prospect of a forty mile ride on the back of Concannon's machine had, however, put a somewhat heavy damper upon his enthusiasm. He was too old for that sort of thing, he had argued to himself rather shamefacedly, forced by Imogen's withering glance to admit the anchoring power of a long sleep and a lazy breakfast next morning. So he had let the boy go, rattling and whizzing off into the dark; and then the next day had lost all that sense of having failed him, realizing in its stead, at the moment of that extraordinary encounter out there, that it was a miraculous bit of luck that had kept him. Indeed he often wondered looking back on it, what would have become of it all, and of them all, if

he had not happened at the temple on that vivid scene that tied the lot of them so irrevocably together. Digby, he learned, when he got home shaking with excitement of his news, had been gathering facts and had a fairly complete chain of evidence ; but though there was enough to convince the Colonel personally, he had lacked just that ocular proof of Trotter's association with the little group of conspirators to justify him in acting on his knowledge. Now the only danger was, that the evidence so precious had come to them too late and might be a signal for an entire change in, or even a giving up of, the conspirators' plan. That all depended on how well he and the doctor had played the part of blithering idiots.

They had driven along that straight ten mile stretch of road in a tonga, at the usual jolting pace, and Choula on the way had told of his interview with Concannon's babu, the red-bearded Mohammedan with the bone-rimmed spectacles. Annandale had not remembered the spectacles, on the day he had seen him in the garden, but they agreed on the intelligence of the man and the impression he gave of mournful, even tragic reserve. Choula had been not at all

satisfied with what he got out of him. Plague seemed to be pretty bad, but not bad enough to make such a fuss about. The people were evidently terrified. They were apt to get into a panic, of course, but the cases of plague were apparently being dealt with quite efficiently by the civil surgeon's Eurasian assistant who was in charge of the plague camp. It would be extremely serious for Concannon if his canal hands were affected. He had had awfully bad luck, what with floods and malaria, and the falling in of one of his dams. His chief was none too keen on him, doubtless because the boy looked such an infant. What complicated matters still more, was the Mela at Auranga in the Hazratpur district.

The plague returns weren't great enough to allow of Government stopping the Mela. It was, anyhow, such a beastly difficult thing to do. With the present unrest in that very quarter, any harsh measures might provoke trouble. There certainly was unrest. He, Choula, had been through there not long ago. The people usually had welcomed him in every village, but this time things were different. He couldn't explain quite what. And none of his old friends

would tell him much. If any one were working up trouble, this outbreak of plague would be the very thing to help him.

Annandale had listened with a growing sense of oppression. What was he going out there for? What could he do? He was an architect, and a silly old man. He wanted his own comfortable rooms and his own comfortable club; his papers and his plans, and his lazy cigarettes. Bobbie's face, as it had appeared to him in the circle of light as he said good-bye, stared at him again out of the wide, dusty, sun-bleached country they were covering.

"You will come out there too," he said at last, as the tonga drew up at the roadside; and when the Indian answered "Yes, of course," felt ridiculously relieved.

The temple stood on the far side of the river, some hundred yards off the road in a grove of pipal trees, above whose tops the rather graceful cone-like dome could be seen from a distance. Below it, the ground fell away in a long slope that flattened out into a river bed, half a mile wide, with the stream, like a ribbon, down the middle of it; and all along the flats under the brilliant sun were *dhobis* washing in the water,

and spreading their dazzling white garments to dry on the sand.

Leaving their tonga on the side of the road, they followed a footpath into the rich shade of the grove. Between the tree trunks they had glimpses of old mildewed walls over-grown with creepers ; and beyond the corner of the temple, a streak of emerald green wheat. By the entrance of the courtyard, a fakir, smeared with ashes, sat cross-legged upon a blanket, his brass begging bowl at his side. No one else was to be seen, though the creaking of a well sounded from the direction of the wheat field.

Even then, they might not have come upon that illuminating scene, had not Kashi Ram failed to find the particular door-way that he was looking for. They had been poking about the maze of little deserted courtyards, penetrating gradually deeper and deeper into that mysterious medley of dumb, forbidding shrines, where faded garlands and crushed blossoms, and the refuse of sacred beasts, lay rotting under the still, strong sun, when suddenly, turning a corner, they stumbled upon the round recumbent body and huge sleepy head of Gopi Chand, blocking a doorway. Peacefully he drowsed, his plump,

childlike face ineffably blank ; and over his head they saw them all, sitting on the ground in a circle with the powerful dwarflike figure of Trotter in their midst.

Petrified, they took in the scene, the waving tree-tops above the opposite wall, the sacred cow browsing in the corner, and the groups of turbaned gentlemen surrounding Benjamin Trotter. He seemed to have been lecturing with Badri Nath at his side for interpreter, and was in the full swing of a vigorous peroration, his hand raised in a gesture of defiance to the sky, when he was arrested by the sight of them.

That drop of his arm as though it had been shot, that instantaneous turning of all the turbaned heads was awful to Annandale, so awful that he scarcely registered the incidental feeling of oppression that swept over him, adding to his mounting sense of horror, at the sight of a familiar red-bearded figure, whom he automatically noted to be that same babu of Concannon's.

It was awful, and incredible and ridiculous. Things like this didn't happen nowadays. It was too absurd. There were no such things as conspiracies. This was just a picnic, a party.

Benjamin Trotter was a fat-head. Digby had said so. They were all fat-heads. He found himself laughing idiotically. The vision of his immaculate conventional self, in the centre of a hot, messy, beastly Indian conspiracy, made him sick. If he went straight back, he could just catch the evening mail for Bombay. He continued laughing.

It was Kashi Ram who moved forward with his usual, stiff, absorbed manner and bearing straight into the group, salaamed before Trotter with oriental formality. Trotter and Badri Nath had already recovered, and by the time Annandale had taken his cue from his friend and followed him, the eight or ten Indian gentlemen were wreathed in smiles of welcome.

It had been necessary then to sit down and grin cheerfully and partake of bottled lemonade and talk about the beauty of the temple. So much Annandale had been able to do, resigning himself at last into Choula's hands and Choula had held them all. With the enthusiasm of a fanatic in his eye he had begun to talk and had given them the history of the temple from the beginning of time, pouring a perfect deluge of history and wit and religious lore and local

anecdote over their bewildered heads. For one hour he kept it up, like a madman, until Annandale's head began to swim, and he wondered if his friend had, after all, noticed nothing, or had gone dotty like himself.

And the Indian gentlemen listened in rapt silence. Badri Nath sat like an idol, his thick hands on his knees, his large fat face inscrutable, his eyes hidden behind dark spectacles. Only Trotter fidgeted and frowned. Indeed, when they at last got up to go and Choula bowed to each one separately, it seemed to Annandale as though they had really forgotten, had succumbed somehow to the spell he had conjured. Enthusiastically they escorted him to the road, and remained salaaming as long as the tonga and its dust were visible.

Annandale had again that feeling of hysteria as he watched those little bandy-legged turbaned figures grow smaller and smaller. He laughed immoderately.

"It's—so—rum." He brought out at last. Choula said nothing. There was a silence during which Annandale stared at the dark gloomy face next him feeling more and more like an idiot as the seriousness of the thing began to appear.

“What was your idea?” he asked.

“Oratory.” Choula mopped his brow.

“Oratory is wine to these chaps. They get drunk on it. That was Concannon’s man.”

“Yes. And Gopi Chand, that clinches it.”

“Who is Gopi Chand?” Choula smiled in his sardonic way.

“Ah—if you don’t know who Gopi Chand is——”

“That’s just what Mrs Digby said.”

“Did she? Well, ask Digby. Give him this. Gopi Chand gave them to me as we came out.”

Annandale took the pair of bone-rimmed spectacles.

“Oh—I say—what the deuce——” He relapsed into the terrible vortex of his thought.

PART II
MOGGIE

CHAPTER I

IMOGEN DAUNT's soul had suffered through the gorgeousness of its prison. It was the soul of a child, open and unafraid; it was suspicious of no one; it saw evil in nothing. Instinctively and indiscriminatingly it trusted the world—and even after years of imprisonment in the person of a sensual and magnetic woman, it had retained its innocence. Nevertheless it had suffered. Refusing to understand evil, it had taken refuge in delusions. A woman of action, she dreamed dreams and translated those dreams into conduct that was logical and terrifying. Whereupon her guardians and her victims alike fell upon her with the various fears of their less robust minds; and to keep them off, that instinct of her health and innocence hardened itself into a kind of hide. So she suffered by becoming wilfully blind, and gradually, unconsciously, obtuse.

She was then, at the age of twenty-seven, apparently very brilliant, but really rather

stupid. She had a way of fastening with a bulldog grip on to an idea, and hanging to it, she let it swing her anywhere. With incomparable freshness, she had come upon those worn fantasies of sex-equality and free love. They had been new and wonderful to her, and she had acted on them. If she had been an ordinary little person, this would not have mattered, but everything she did was always attended by the full blare of press trumpets, and her notorious indiscretions had made her, by a natural enough freak, the fad of that upper ten who create excitement for the newspapers. A certain very flighty duchess had adopted her, and still possessed by her idea, Imogen had gone among these weary, satiated worldlings and they, seeing the madness in her eye, had played up to it.

Susan Digby alone, had watched in an agony of fear, and had at last sent for her to come out to India for the winter; and Imogen at the time, sulking because a very fascinating Frenchman after making love in idealistic terms had refused to leave his wife and family and defy the world with her, had been glad to come.

By chance Mr Benjamin Trotter was on the same ship. Though they had been associated more or less continually in the suffrage agitation, Imogen had known nothing of his projected trip to India and had expressed some surprise on meeting him, but he had explained the nature of his mission—to find out what the people of India really did think about the Government; and had explained it so well, that she had reached Bombay on fire with the desire to help him.

Only once, when they entered the Digby's compound unheralded on the day of the garden party, had she been pricked by a doubt of her own wisdom. For one moment, gazing upon Susan's face, she had seen something, had had a flash of insight that had illumined things strangely, in terrible new relationships, and then the shutters of her mind had clapped down again and she had banished fear. Susan was a darling and Digby was a dear, and Trotter was simply splendid, so of course it would all be right. The fact that Digby was "Government" and Trotter was "anti-Government," was so much less important than the fact that they were both *keen*—and besides, she must help Trotter.

They were comrades. He had fought beside her at home and even been in prison for the *Cause*. She must stick to him.

But on the day that she addressed the Indian Ladies' Association, she experienced another of those flashes of insight. It happened in the middle of her speech, and again it was Susan's face that did it.

Susan was sitting in the front row, next to Lady Howard, the L.G.'s wife. There were about a hundred women in the room, most of them Indians in lovely silken garments, who sat quite still with their great dark eyes rivetted upon her and never a ray of expression passing over their slender faces. It had been difficult to speak; more difficult than she had ever found anything before. Her eyes had wandered over the many-coloured graceful figures to the sunlit verandah where the women servants dozed peacefully; and she had longed wildly for some interrupting voice such as she was used to, at home, for some good lively heckling to drop into the dead atmosphere of the hall, but there was only a sound of someone arranging tea-cups in the adjoining room.

She had been talking, of course, about the

woman's movement in England, had finished with her introduction and was in the midst of a personal narrative of one of the Suffrage raids on the House of Commons, when Susan's face had suddenly arrested her. It had gone dead white and her eyes were red with smarting tears, and she was trying with her teeth to control the convulsive twisting of her mouth.

"Why?" had come the question shouting through her discourse; "Why? Why?"

Suddenly she had stopped and for one moment it had all gone from her; all that she had said and all that she had still to say, all, too, that she had ever believed and everything that she had ever been through to prove her beliefs; and she felt that she was mad. In the great emptiness that surrounded her, all that she could see was Susan's face, white and wretched and thin. Staring there, she seemed to see the great chasm between this sunlit dreaming unfathomable Orient and that terribly active strident West. She saw herself in a cart in the Strand beating off a crowd of men with her whip, and she saw at the same instant that tottering woman with the infant in her ragged arms who had crept weakly away from the dispensary. Where was

the connection between the two? There was a connection, but where? She had lost it. She had nothing more to say. Susan's face was trying to say it for her. But what did it mean?

If it had not been for Mrs Badri Nath's brilliant smile, at this juncture, she would certainly have rushed down from the platform, but with that smile, her audience came into focus once more, and she went on somehow, automatically and successfully to the end.

Afterwards, while she drank tea and talked to the little fluttering women who spoke so timidly and giggled so shyly, she wondered what she had said all the time she was on the platform, and went over it again and again, all that she could remember, to find out what had distressed Susan. Susan had not spoken to her since, she had been surrounded immediately by a group of lovely young things in green and crimson and gold gauze, whom she petted and played with as though they were dolls. There was a dainty hilarity in Susan's attitude toward these Indian girls. Mischief and delight were in her eye and yet, half an hour ago, she had been on the point of weeping. Susan was like that. And she would never explain, she would only

look at her with those straight clear eyes and keep her little lips closed, sweetly and finally.

Absent-mindedly Imogen let herself be piloted about by Mrs Badri Nath. There was an odour of cocoa-nut oil and musk about Mrs Badri Nath that was almost sickening! "Yes, she would like to meet the Begam!" She was presented to an enormously fat figure wrapped around in cloth of gold. A small full moon made of brown dough and punctured by two tiny black eyes and a button-like mouth creased itself jovially, and a plump hand covered with rings grasped her own. Susan was talking to Lady Howard now. Her voice pierced the fluttering chirping talk, sweet and high.

"You really think them such viragos?"
"No, I don't think I agree with you—I am one myself—yes—I even joined a raid."

Imogen turned her head. Susan's smiling eyes were fixed upon the face of the chief lady in the station.

Lady Howard stared back at her coldly, displeasure and astonishment on her rather wooden face.

"Mrs Digby is defending you," said Mrs Badri Nath with her sudden smile. Imogen

gazed at the red disc on her forehead and felt a little sick.

“ Why should she ? ”

“ Ah,” murmured the Indian woman, sweeping the end of her purple sari over her shoulder, “ she is responsible for you.” She smiled again.

“ To whom ? ” wondered Imogen.

There was a clatter of horses hoofs and a gleam of scarlet coats through the straw chick as the Government House carriage drew up at the door.

A flutter passed over the many-coloured Saris. Sudden nervous little smiles appeared on the dark jewelled faces. There was a confusion of bows, of salaams, of little giggling murmurs. Lady Howard swept from the room.

“What disgraceful servility,” muttered Imogen half to herself, glowering, then looked up. Mrs Badri Nath with her eyes upon her, was smiling again.

CHAPTER II

THE Badri Naths lived in a large bungalow that had been left behind at the crossing of two thoroughfares, while all the adjacent land that had once borne similar houses had been used up in a big building scheme. Great square blocks of red brick shouldered it on either side and opposite, directly beyond the cross-roads where seethed a continual vortex of sheep and cattle, and laden donkeys and coolies, were the towers of the Islamia College and the long brick walls of its hostels. The bungalow was two-storied and fifty years old, and seemed not to have been whitewashed in the present generation. Unprotected by compound or hedge, it took full in the face all the dust of that ceaseless traffic of *tum-tums* and Bareilly carts that raced between the native city and the railway station, growing with each season a little more blistered and battered, and yet preserving to itself by its very contrast with those new brick buildings, a kind of haggard and sullen importance.

The Badri Nath's lived on the upper floor, and below them, in a half dozen rooms, lived their newspaper, the Hindustan which purported to be the mouthpiece of the crowd outside.

Imogen had been invited to tea, conspicuously this time, without Mrs Digby, and Susan had let her go without other comment than that Samuel would accompany her and bring her home.

Imogen walked fast, the Indian servant following a few steps behind her. She had chosen to walk, for things, she called them "things," were beginning to bother her, and walking always helped. She was to meet Trotter at the Badri Nath's, she knew and somehow she didn't like that. Trotter had a way before other people of making her say just what he chose, and she didn't want to say anything more until she'd had a long talk with him alone. She had not seen Trotter for an age. He had been away somewhere rather mysteriously and she was hurt by his lack of confidence in her. He was evidently giving her up to the Digbys and all their official friends. She was certain that he had schemes on hand. Trotter was never without schemes. And if, as he had suggested on their way out, he was going to have a

grand educational campaign throughout India, why couldn't he let her help ?

It was unkind of him and yet on the other hand, did she want to help ? What kind of educative work could they do ? They could certainly make trouble. That was good in itself sometimes. At home ; anything to rouse the people, but here, somehow, it was different. She had lost her nerve. It was all on account of Susan — Susan stood in the way.

If she was to be true to her principles, she must get away from Susan. The thought made her ache a little.

At the cross-roads she paused. A flock of sheep, branded with a crimson mark and driven by a mud-coloured urchin in a single garment, blocked the way. Dust rose in smothering clouds opaquely yellow under the brilliant sun. It was hot, and a fearful din rising from the bazaars seemed to sound and resound against the hard metallic sky.

Samuel, passing in front of her, made a way across the road, holding up a swaying *tum tum* full of huddled women, with his scarlet arm. As she reached the other side, four men trotting wonderfully in unison and carrying on

their heads a stretcher covered with a cloth that scarce concealed the corpse they were bearing to burial, came swiftly from the direction of the city, cleaving the throng before them as a boat cleaves the water. Their stiff and terribly exposed burden rocked gaily down the bazaar above the heads of the unheeding multitude.

Imogen climbed the stairway on the outside of the house and entered from the verandah, staring blindly in the sudden darkness; aware, by that strange perfume that always accompanied the Indian woman, that her hostess had come forward. Something soft and highly scented was thrown over her head, and as her eyes became accustomed to the light, she saw a room full of people all with garlands of jasmine in their hands, which were evidently meant for her. Feeling ridiculous for the first time in her life she bent her neck, and one after another the little, shining, bronze-faced creatures decorated her in smiling silence.

The room was large and open on three sides to the verandah, across which one could see the dust rising from the bazaar. Around the wall were ranged a row of bentwood chairs and behind

these chairs, plaster walls of a pale blue colour, stained with saltpetre, clambered unrelieved by any pictures or hangings to a dark, cob-webbed ceiling. A large mirror in a gilt frame and a huge chandelier with thousands of crystals were evidently intended for beauty ; of comfort there was none.

Imogen, with a mounting sense of the ludicrous, and beginning to perspire uncomfortably about the neck, gazed about her at the individuals whom she had been, somewhat pointedly, invited to meet. The men, got up for the occasion in frock coats and patent leather boots, were not picturesque ; and though the women were, their complete lack of *aplomb*, and the almost total absence of conversation, made them all seem idiotic. They sat in a circle round the wall, staring at her and smiling, while a hollow-chested young girl in a black sari spotted with tarnished gold, passed tea with a tragic, ingratiating face.

Imogen took a cup of tea and a hard little green cake, and smiled at the girl. She was a consumptive, her complexion was unhealthy, but there was pluck and fire in her.

“ This is my step-daughter,” said Mrs Badri

Nath, laying her jewelled hand on the child's thin shoulder. "She helps me so very much with my woman's paper. She has been educated at the Mission College and is now studying medicine."

The girl smiled wanly, her eyes staring with such absolute adoration that even Imogen understood.

"Tell me about yourself," she said, ignoring all the hesitating, encroaching figures in the background.

The girl smiled again, her wide mouth parting to display rather bad teeth, but her eyes remaining desperately fixed. She started to speak.

"Pardon me," broke in her mother and said something quickly in the vernacular. The girl shut her lips and looked at the ground, then moved away.

Imogen flushed, and meeting the older woman's eyes, held them a moment, but she could read nothing there. They were like beautiful bits of glass, and the face in which they were set was as hard as bronze metal.

Imogen was at a loss. She began to feel suspicious. What did these people mean by

their absurdly formal reception? What did they want with her? What was there behind that cruel, handsome face? Why was Trotter so thick with these people? She looked across to where he stood, talking to their host, Badri Nath. He, Trotter, had scarcely bowed to her as she came in. He was biding his time. He would come forward presently and draw her in.

Mrs Badri Nath was talking of her speech at the Indian Ladies Association. It had been so wonderful; she was saying that they had reported it in full in the Hindustan, and they had all there together, that afternoon, meant to ask her to repeat it, or to at least speak for them again; and this time to a mixed audience. Their readers would throng to hear her. Yes, certainly she could see the report of her speech, but it was in the vernacular and Miss Daunt had, doubtless, not as yet learned Hindustani.

It was at this point, when she was irrationally entertaining a suspicion that they had misquoted her, that Trotter came forward. Solidly, he stood in the middle of the room facing her.

“My dear young friend,” he said slowly. “You have done well. You have struck a new note for the women of this land. They have already rallied round you.” He waved his strong stubby hand. “We all—am I not right?” and he bowed toward the others, “We all welcome you as one of us.” There was a murmur of assent and a closing in of the circle. “We are delighted that you have identified yourself with those who have the welfare of India and of Indian women so at heart.” He paused, and Imogen, who had been struggling to free her throat from those suffocating garlands, rose to her feet. Trotter waved her off. “It’s alright, my dear. I have vouched for you.” He fixed her with his keen eyes that glittered strangely under his bushy grey eyebrows. “I have,” he repeated slowly and with emphasis, “pledged my word that you are trustworthy.”

There was a silence. Still fumbling with those terrible chaining garlands, Imogen gazed from one to another. Expressionless—all those faces beneath their white turbans and their silken hoods—smilingly expressionless. And then her gaze fell upon the face of the little girl,

the little, old, woman-child. The lips were parted and a terrible suspense, all too much like fear, held those plain emaciated features in a vice. As though everyone else had dropped away, Imogen fixed her, and still with that sense of being ridiculous, of being played with, of being outraged, she brought out to that strange little face—"What was it that I said?"

Only bewilderment on the face.

"In the speech, in the Hindustan I mean," repeated Imogen in a louder tone.

"Oh," wailed the child in an agony of timidity and adoration, "You said we must be free, free from bondage, free from sickness, free from despair." She had come forward a little as she spoke and one hand was outstretched, the other clutching her limp garment to her breast.

Imogen with a final wrench tore the garlands from her shoulder.

"And is that all?" she cried to those faces about her. "That has been said before, hundreds of times before. That is nothing," she stammered and paused. Something was behind it all, something lurked there, in those dark, hidden souls of theirs; but they were barred

from her, and their faces stared at her, as closed houses, shuttered and deserted, stare upon the passer by. The little girl alone was open to her, and the little girl, evidently, did not know. Trotter was the one who knew. Trotter must be made to tell.

She laughed and some instinct made her turn to them in a splendid simulation of cordiality.

“You are too kind,” she undulated to the door. “Come to see me,” she said lightly to the step-daughter, “and good-bye, with many thanks for a delightful afternoon.” She smiled at Mrs Badri Nath. She had not been insincere in this particularly contemptible way since she could remember. Just outside, she turned again.

“Mr Trotter,” she said, “I shall expect you to-morrow morning.”

Mr and Mrs Badri Nath were effecting an extraordinary display of teeth. Their smiles of adieu seemed almost fierce. “Will they abuse her?” she thought suddenly.

Outside, the ceaseless clamour of the bazaar rose and beat against the hard sky and fell and rose again. Sheep and cattle, and donkeys and

naked coolies, and a medley of carts thronged the thoroughfare, and, again, four men trotting wonderfully in unison, bearing on their heads a corpse for burial, went cleaving their way through the crowd.

CHAPTER III

IMOGEN lay in a long chair under a tree in the garden, smoking and awaiting, in a luxurious laze, the arrival of Trotter. That sickly feeling of oppression that she was beginning to connect now with the smell of Mrs Badri Nath's perfumes, had vanished. It had vanished before her immense enjoyment of the dance last night, of her cold bath this morning, of the large breakfast she had only just finished. India looked so different viewed from Susan's garden.

Really the only trouble with the Badri Naths was that they were so filthy. Imogen stretched out her heavy muscular arms. Delicious to be strong, delicious to be clean from top to toe. Oh, delicious to be well-fed and comfortable and drowsy.

She had always believed in Trotter, in spite of what his own colleagues said about him—he had been called the Feminist Dwarf—partly for that reason. Their ridicule of him had seemed to her small and envious; and ever since that

night in Parliament Square when he had bunted a way with her through the crowd, she had thought of him as a splendid figure. That night, in the crowd that seethed under the arc lights of Whitehall and the Square, he had been almost a hero, and whenever anyone made fun of him, she had only to think of their common exaltation in the fight. She thought of it now; remembering, in spite of herself, that he had been discredited by his own party; and that the Badri Nath had smiled ferociously. She thought successfully. Trotter was splendid. It was all right.

But it was his absurd servant whose turbaned head appeared above the hedge, like an enormous animated plum. He waddled toward her across the grass and stopped bowing profoundly.

“The Sahib sends salaams. He is coming.”

There was something enigmatic about this cheerful, ridiculous person.

“And why is he detained?”

“The Sahib fell into a drain. There was a bad smell.”

“However did he fall into a drain?”

“He was on the back of a horse and there was

a camel in the way——” He paused, his little eyes rolled upward.

“Oh!” said Imogen, struggling with her sense of humour, and suddenly afraid of it. The little man bowed.

“Salaam Huzoor.”

He seemed about to go. What was there about him? Was he laughing at Trotter as she dared not laugh?

“Tell me, Gopi Chand, what did you do before you were Trotter Sahib’s servant?”

“Everything, Miss Sahib.”

“Everything?”

“I was first cook, then I was tailor, then the children in my house became many——”

“How many children have you?”

“Ten—six sons, Miss Sahib.”

“And four daughters?”

“Six sons, Miss Sahib.”

“But then four daughters——”

Gopi Chand rolled his eyes. “It is to my shame——”

“Nonsense.”

“Huzoor.” He bowed hopelessly.

There was a pause. “Then after you’d been a tailor?” went on Imogen, baffled.

“ I became bunnia. I bought grain for silver. I sold it for gold. During times of plenty the grain begot more grain in my go-down. In times of famine, it begot gold.”

“ I see. You grew rich through the sufferings of the multitude.”

“ Huzoor,” murmured Gopi Chand, bowing meekly.

“ And when you grew rich ? ”

“ I was then a great man. All the village did as I said. The men brought their women to me to know what they should do with the unfaithful ones.” Gopi’s eyes glistened ; a beatific smile spread over his kind round face. “ They wanted always to cut off the nose of the woman. Once there was a contract, that if she were unfaithful he would cut off the nose and if he were unfaithful he must give her half income. Well, this man, he kept his wife three months and he sold her to Mohammedan for sixty rupees. The Mohammedan, he kept her three weeks and sold her for twenty-five rupees, then my friend bought her and she ran away to priest who told her to go to barrister and get half the income of first husband.”

“ What did you do ? ”

"I told my friend to wait till she had got the money and then we would get her back."

"Did you?"

"No, Miss Sahib, her first husband poisoned her——" He paused. "We lost the money."

Imogen collapsed. The little man backed away through the sunshine. He looked genial, funny, kind; and he was a monster. How Trotter had been fooled. It was preposterous. A suspicion pricked her. She was seized with the desire to fling back into the chair and let go and laugh, and let it all go—all—all—for they were absurd—absurd—but she sat rigid saying to herself that the servant was a monster. By the time Trotter arrived, she had smoked a soothing cigarette and was comfortable once more.

Smiling through untroubled half-closed eyes she watched him, as he stepped over the row of flower pots lining the drive and came toward her across the grass. In the presence of his splendid stolidity, the lingering whiff of the absurd "bad smell" vanished away.

"I'm really too comfortable to move," she said, giving him her hand and slanting her eyes at him over her recumbent shoulder.

He stared at her in his straight hard way that she liked so much.

“You mustn’t bother me,” he began curtly, “you mustn’t get feminine.”

He wasted no time in apologies, did not allude to his mishap ; hit the nail straight on the head ; he was admirable.

“I won’t again,” she said brightly, and then to get the last vestige of discomfort off her mind, she went on, “that servant of yours, you must get rid of him. He’s a fiend.”

He sat down. “Nonsense, my dear, he’s an excellent servant.”

“That’s neither here nor there. His idea of womanhood is too appalling.”

The remark seemed to irritate Trotter. He answered abruptly. “I’ve never discussed the subject with him, but as a servant he has exemplified one of my theories perfectly. He asked fifteen rupees a month, I gave him thirty. He has been most satisfactory. I might even say, extraordinarily so. That proves, you see, that he is capable of responding to generosity. His enhanced self-respect, due to the enhanced value I give his service, has produced the desired result.”

Imogen drummed on the arm of her chair.

“Hum—I wonder. You know, sometimes I think you are quite stupid—quite oblivious. I’ve a feeling there is something——” What was she talking about? What Trotter said was quite sound of course. Why couldn’t she let it pass? There was a pause that seemed to her more than awkward. The idea, that here, at this moment, her relations with Trotter might very well be terminated once and for all, presented itself with startling clarity.

“Have you anything on your mind?” he asked suddenly in a loud tone, “because if you have, out with it, quick. No hedging.”

The idea vanished. Had she funked it, she asked herself.

“It’s gone.”

She stared into the tree-tops. “I didn’t like it yesterday. The Badri Naths are so smelly—and I can’t make ’em out. Besides they are so different, that fitting one’s principles to ’em is like hanging one’s best clothes on to a kangaroo.”

Trotter didn’t speak. Neither did he smile, he only stared, his face, what there was of it to

be seen between beard and moustache and eyebrows, set in its usual sullen intensity.

Imogen lit another cigarette.

“However, as I say. It’s gone.”

He nodded his big head. “That’s right.” His fatherly tone closed the subject.

Imogen, for some reason unknown to herself, flushed a little. It was all very well for Trotter to finish her off like that ; and, of course, it was splendid his being so impersonal, so detached—but——

Imogen did not analyze. She had a feeling ; a feeling of pique, a desire to exert power ; a little hot fluttering feeling. She swung her feet off the chair on to the ground and sat there, hunched up, facing him. Lifting her eyelids slowly, lazily, she smiled.

“And now do tell me, how it’s coming on,” she said coaxingly.

“What ? ” he asked back.

Turning her head a little, she formed her lips into a round O and blew a thin cloud of smoke through them, then turned her face to him again.

He brought his eyes to hers.

“Oh—your tour of inspection,” she stopped. They eyed one another.

"Trotter—you're keeping something back. You're keeping a lot back." She leaned closer, searching that forbidding face of his. "Aren't you going to tell me about it?"

"I don't know. That depends."

"On what?" She ruminated, and then at last coming to it suddenly, the same thing, she brought it out. "On Mrs Digby?" It was almost a gasp.

He nodded.

"You mean I couldn't let on?"

Again he nodded.

"Do you mean that I would have to leave her?"

"No. It would help more if you didn't."

"Do you mean that it could possibly harm her?"

"Not any more than you."

"But any?"

"I don't know. Not physically, anyway."

There was a silence. She thought, winding her arms around her knees. Suddenly she flushed.

"But you've drawn me in already. You did yesterday."

He did not answer.

“For goodness sake tell me what I’m in for,” she said vehemently.

Her intensity seemed at last to have given him his cue.

“My dear child, it’s nothing so serious. There’s no danger involved to your friends. It’s a good big thing, a plan in which it is quite fitting that you should have a part, and I trust your discretion absolutely. You have kept silence over much more dreadful things before this. Still, on account of your official friends I would have left you out,” she made a gesture of dissent, “if it had not been that you can help us, so much. You are a connecting link.”

He paused.

“Well,” she asked, still with foreboding in her voice. And then as he still waited she dropped her arms against her sides and turned up her face to him. “You can trust me,” she said.

It was then, while he leaned back, satisfied, looking around him over the sun-dappled lawns to make sure that there was no one within ear-shot, that she experienced for the very first time in her life, that strange little sickening sensation of guilt. It was such an unpleasant sensation that she put it away from her deliberately by

turning to him again with an increased attention ; and to do this successfully, she, for some reason, had to put her hand on his arm and look at him differently.

“ I have come out,” he said in a low conversational tone, “ to organize a strike among the ‘ patrols ’ and ‘ pat-waris ’ on a canal.”

“ What are the ‘ pat-waris ’ ? ”

“ They are the native overseers of the Canal hands. They are striking for native control.”

“ For higher pay ? ”

“ No—for control. It’s a political move. If it works they can take over all the canal work themselves.”

“ Who can ? ”

“ The Indians.”

“ And then ? ”

“ Then they’ll push the British engineers out, and gradually they can do the same in other departments.”

“ Oh—and peaceably get charge of their own affairs altogether ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ It sounds a good idea.”

“ It’s the only way in the Punjab—because it’s only through labour organization that

they can get Mohammedans and Hindus to join."

"Why?"

"Because they've nothing else in common and hate each other."

"Who says so?"

"Everybody—your man, Kashi Ram."

"Is he in with you?"

"No—not by a long way."

She said to herself that she was relieved. It sounded quite easy, and as she gazed at the Idea, it grew splendid, far-reaching, stupendous.

"I'm with you, of course," she said at last, giving him her hand, with one of her generous enthusiastic gestures.

"That's right," he patted it. They sat still a moment. He patted it again, then they both rose suddenly.

"All that I want to ask of you just now," he began in another tone, "is a cheque for a hundred pounds, on loan. Can you let me have it?"

Her momentary shock of displeasure made her flush with shame.

"Yes, of course. I'll run in and write it out for you now."

As she rumaged in her desk, she said to herself,

"Concannon is the British engineer. Poor boy." She felt a little sick as she wrote out the amount.

Trotter had called his tonga when she came out and put an envelope into his hand. She looked at him strangely.

"It's Bobbie Concannon's district, isn't it?"

"Yes—what's that got to do with it?"

"Oh—nothing. Only he's in love with me, that's all."

Benjamin Trotter smiled.

"That suits me perfectly," he said, and went jauntily down the steps.

And Moggie looking at that broad, powerful back, for one moment as it showed in the receding tonga, loathed it.

"I've done it," she muttered to herself, going into the house; "the very thing that I always thought no one would ever do."

CHAPTER IV

IMOGEN after this began to notice that things were complicated. Heretofore life had been quite simple. One lived up to one's principles and carried out one's ideas ; and that was all. There was, of course, the question of sex that bothered one sometimes ; one fell in love more or less constantly ; but the storm always blew over and afterwards the air was clear. One adopted a point of view on such matters and treated oneself as a case. Love affairs were as inevitable to women as chicken-pox and measles to children. Very well then, accepting this thing, sexual feeling, as a fact not to be despised, nor ignored nor worshipped, one proceeded to put it in its rightful place, and this was done by crowding it out of prominence, with other more important interests. If one were keen enough on one's work, one's heart-affairs didn't matter much.

But, of course, to do this successfully one had to be single-minded, certain of one's convictions.

The least gnawing doubt might let through a flood of feeling, and if feeling flooded out one's mind, one was done for. Therefore, no doubts——

Imogen was not having doubts, she was merely restless and unhappy. Waking in the morning was no fun any more. There was a load somewhere, not on her heart; she didn't think of it as on her heart. There was just a load and a mental sensation akin to having a bad taste in one's mouth. Sue's ayah came in with tea at seven thirty, and after that there was an hour before her voice summoned one to a bath. Imogen had delighted in this hour, she delighted in it no more. The delicious lazy weight of her body that used to make her purr and snuggle down and hug her pillows with sheer pleasure was gone; she lay rigid nowadays, puffing successive cigarettes and thinking. Things were on her mind.

She had become conscious of Digby as a source of excitement, and of Sue as a source of fear. The two things were *not*, as yet, logically connected. She was afraid of Sue's smile, afraid of her contempt, afraid of her aloofness. Any attempt on her own part to break down that reserve would be about as effective as if a large

puppy licked that dainty hand. Sue was hiding nothing deliberately, but that crystal rigidity of hers was absolutely baffling. It made one feel lonely and hopeless, and stupid. Sue always made one feel a clumsy, blundering fool. She was so wonderful herself, so subtle and so elusive; far too subtle and too elusive for her husband. Dear funny old Annandale understood her much better. If he weren't quite such a footling thin-blooded specimen, he might have—but, of course, Digby was much more of a man.

There you had it, Digby was a man; not a God nor a fiend, just a man, indeed more of a man than anybody. And Digby had played up rather well. If only he didn't hate Trotter so. If only he weren't so much the official. These officials made one mad with their everlasting Duty. They irritated one to the point of revolt. If one only tried, one might break that down, and a good thing too.

Digby was "pro-native" but what did that mean? Nothing! Absolutely nothing if it came to sacrificing his chance of the Governorship or a fat billet at home in the India Office. Sue wanted one of the two things of course. It was too bad. Just to think of Digby sitting

down with all those old women in Whitehall. Why, he might be doing big things. He was just the kind of man, with his executive ability, to reorganize the whole of the Government of the Punjab. If he would only break away, if one could only make him.

One couldn't quite see him hand-in-glove with the Badri Nath—*that* was the trouble. Still there must be some better stuff among the Indian seditionists, some more like Kashi Ram Choula. He was another perfectly good man spoiled. A born leader, grubbing away in a perfectly filthy hole—oh—oh——

But there was Susan. She stood in the way of one's doing anything. Her face at that meeting! Susan could never be brought to see—and somehow one couldn't sacrifice Sue. One simply could not. She was the best thing in the world. Why was it that the very best thing in the world stood in the way of one's principles? It was all a horrid muddle.

This sort of thing went on in Imogen's mind every morning now, and every day it seemed as though something happened to complicate matters still more.

Without quite realizing it, she had begun to

experiment on Digby. She dropped into his study every morning and talked with him for half an hour. He had begun by laughing at her and answering her scores of questions about municipal committees, and plague commissions and famine relief and the administration of justice, with absurdities, but he had stopped that after a while, and was telling her a lot. Sometimes he grew angry when she criticized, and told her she didn't know what she was talking about, but he was beginning to have some respect at least for her interest. They were to go out on tour in another fortnight he told her, and then she would see the real India. The station was not India. Kashi Ram was perfectly right, India was the land of villages. When they got as far as that, their talk began to degenerate a little, but still she kept on going, for she wanted to broach the subject of Trotter and the Badri Nath. She didn't dare just yet. She must get him to like her a little more first. It was apropos of this that something happened one morning, nothing much, but something that brought with it the same little weakening, sickening feeling that she had experienced the morning she gave Trotter the cheque.

Digby had been telling her of a tiger shoot that he was going to arrange for her in February in Nepal. They would all go. Sue delighted in that sort of a trip. The Rajah would put them up. It had been particularly pleasing in the study that morning. There was something nice about having other people turned away from the door by the scarlet-coated *chaprassi* outside on the verandah. Digby, too, looked particularly big and competent. She had longed secretly for a tiger-shoot. Digby was splendid. He could do anything. She was beginning to enjoy the smell of his pipe and the general masculine atmosphere of dusty books and letter-files, and untidy desks and worn leather chairs that surrounded him. Sitting on the corner of his table, her eyes half-closed, she dreamed of the tiger-shoot—at least it seemed to her she was dreaming of that. The sunlight outside crept warmly through the bamboo screen that hung across the open door. A native, somewhere in the servants' quarters, was playing a weird tune of five notes over and over again on a reedy flute-like instrument. Suddenly it happened. She felt it coming and she did not move. A wave of heat swept up to her throat,

choking her. The smell of his pipe and his clothes and his skin was strong in her nostrils. Then for one second everything in the world was blotted out.

It was absurd this sick feeling of condemnation. She had been kissed by dozens of men before—one couldn't help it.

From the doorway she faced him naturally enough, and then at the sight of his face and the sound of his uncertain laugh, fled from him to her room. Why, oh why, need he have looked like that, and why had he laughed in that awful sheepish way? She loathed him for that.

And it was right on top of this that the little Indian girl, Fulmani, the daughter of Mrs Badri Nath, came to see her. The child's case was so plain that Imogen could only explain her own temporary unwillingness to help, on the ground of that same distraught condition that was growing so. At any other time she would have welcomed this pitiful appeal with all the warmth of sure and competent understanding, but now, contemptibly enough, she looked at the sensitive, woe-begone face and listened to the desperate monotone, and hesitated.

Another door seemed to open suddenly before Imogen's eyes as Fulmani told her tale, crouching in a chair, by the bedroom fire; a door into a region unutterably dark. And all the time that she talked, Imogen stared through that dreary aperture into a situation so baffling, that a feeling more akin to despair than anything she had ever known before, took possession of her.

It was the parents of this miserable creature who were doing the unspeakable thing, and it was the same who were the very centre and guarantee of Trotter's scheme. It was impossible to reconcile the two things, and yet they must be reconciled. She had pledged herself to them, and now suddenly through one of their very own, she was arraigned against them.

The case was simple enough. Fulmani was already past the marrying age. Her own mother had been ambitious for her and had prevailed with her father in planning for the girl a college education. Disappointed in the beginning because she was not a boy, they had counted on her making for herself a career. They were now disappointed again, and her stepmother

had no patience with her. She had failed twice in her medical examinations. She was not brilliant like her stepmother, and the work was too hard. At last, they had given it up and had decided to marry her off; but she was not beautiful and she was old, twenty-one. It had been difficult to find a husband, but they had found one; and in spite of all her weeping, they had betrothed her to him. He was an old man, fifty-five at least, with two daughters as old as herself. He had a long crooked nose and big ears. Some people thought him quite imbecile.

Imogen gazed at the little cowering figure in its pale silken garments, hopelessly.

“What can I do for you?” she asked with strange apathy.

Fulmani spread out her hands.

“Ah,” she quivered, “that I do not know. But you gave me hope and courage—and since I have seen you, I have felt that I could defy them.” She lifted her head and Imogen saw that her eyes were blazing.

“They hate me,” she went on. “Both my father and my step-mother. Why should I obey them? My father is a beast. He killed

my own mother. Oh yes, I know what I am saying. My mother was timid and old-fashioned, she would have only the lady doctor. They thought it was a tumour that she had, but she was with child. My father knew and he never told. The Doctor—Miss Sahib, had told him that if she had another child she would die. He had promised. - So he let her die.” Her voice had dropped to a whimper. “My mother was so beautiful—you don’t know, and she loved me.” She dropped her face in her hands.

Imogen sat perfectly still.

“What do you propose to do?” she asked at last. The girl straightened her shoulders.

“I shall run away,” and then as though frightened by the immobility of the other’s face, “you don’t know what it is, in India—to be married to an old man and sent far away. One is a slave—to all the families that live together. The jealousy of the women—the fear that they may poison your child—or the fear that you may have no child—the fear that the husband you hate may die and leave you a widow. Oh—you cannot understand. I shall be kept in

purdah down there. There will be no books and no air—only intrigue and scandal and disease, and all the time to share the bed of an idiot, a deformed old man. You cannot imagine——” her voice trailed off into silence.

With a feeling of deadly cold Imogen rose to her feet and went to the desk. There was twenty pounds there in small rupee notes and ten rupees in silver.

“There,” she said hoarsely, “take that and go away with it.”

The Indian girl rose trembling and shaking like a poor battered branch in an angry wind. She pushed the money from her.

“I do not need it,” she said gazing at Imogen strangely. “I did not come for that.”

They stared at one another a long moment, and then, with a little moaning movement, Fulmani turned away.

“My dear, my dear,” said Imogen wildly, “I can do nothing else. Don’t you see? I don’t know—anything that will help you. I don’t know anything at all.”

The other was at the door. She turned again

wistfully and put out a thin brown hand from under her limp sari, and waited there mutely.

Imogen, standing still with the money in her hand, let her go.

CHAPTER V

THE disjointedness of the Anglo-Indian household, where each room had its separate entrance, and each inmate a special servant, made life possible for the next week in spite of the tightening strain between Imogen and Susan. Imogen had her own engagements, and a trap at her disposal to enable her to fulfil them. A picnic in some ancient gardens, a hunt at eight in the morning followed by a breakfast party in a bachelor's "chummery," a two-day's shoot with a jolly chaperone, tennis every afternoon, and almost every evening dancing in the Gymkhana, made up a round which kept her physically fit; and if she despised the ideas of the civilians and soldiers who took her tearing about the country, she adored their sportsmanship, and quite forgot, for hours together in her immensely enjoyed physical exertion, that there was a hot and bewildering muddle where she had a "mission."

In the mornings, between eleven and one, she

read laboriously the books Dr Choula had sent her. They were fat books, nearly as big as medical works, and far harder reading. The facts were few and far between—rare oases in the desert pages of philosophy that, with a dance tune ringing in her head, she was tempted to call nonsense, and yet she had read something of the religions of India before, and had thought that she was interested. She felt now as though lost in one of those ornate and bewildering temples. The idea, too, seemed lost in a diseased crowd of symbols. For a week she plodded on, learning nothing it seemed to her and yet determined to learn.

She blamed the perfumes in the garden and the hot sun shimmering beyond the verandah and the general air of slackness about everything. Fulmani's face, too, swam before her, obliterating the pages. She must go to someone about Fulmani. Not to Sue.

It meant so much and involved so much, the acknowledging of one's futility to a person who knew you so well. Sue would see much more than the facts of the case. She would expect a change of attitude, and if she were disappointed she would freeze a little more and withdraw a

little further. There was Mrs Trueman of course.

Imogen put it off, and abandoned, too, her reading. The books were a bore, and the tennis tournament was on, and there were young men in white flannels and young men in pink coats, clamouring at the gate.

And all this time Susan said nothing, just kissed her lightly before breakfast and watched her go off somewhere and was always intent on something else herself, and held her head high during the day and averted, until that slender back of hers began to seem almost cruel.

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Fulmani's face swam against a murky background, distorted with fear. Someone, it must be Mrs Trueman, was laughing in spasmodic wheezings, and saying over and over again. "You with your youth and beauty—you——" The yellow quivering face was swallowed up and Susan's voice said, "Moggie, Moggie!"

Imogen opened her eyes. Susan stood over her with a lighted candle in her hand. She was fully dressed and had a cloak over her shoulders.

“Samuel’s wife is in labour,” she said in a low, rapid tone. “Something is wrong. Dr Choula has been there all night. He wants you to come and help.”

She put the candle on the table.

“I will make you a cup of tea while you’re dressing. It’s three o’clock.” She disappeared.

Imogen dressed swiftly. Something to do, thank goodness; something definite to do. That awful dream! Mrs Trueman had said those very words to her the day before.

And Sue had at last been forced to come to her. That in itself was an immense relief. Everything would be all right now. Apropos of this new baby, she would tell Sue all about Fulmani and acknowledge her failure.

“One thing you will have to do,” said Susan, coming back with a tray of tea things, “is to hand over the baby, ‘Ek dum,’ to the grandmother. There will be war if you don’t. I found the whole family in the room when I arrived, and the eldest boy—he’s ten—watching his mother, fascinated. Samuel had gone for the doctor.”

Imogen, gulping down her tea and doing up her hair at the same time, gazed at the other's face wonderingly. It was blue with cold and fatigue.

"Do you do this for all their babies?" she asked.

"Yes—usually. They like me to come. I bring good luck." She laughed a little. "Now, my child, there's no time to waste."

They went out through the dressing-room door on to the verandah. The night was bitterly cold. A million stars danced like points of icy fire in the heavens. A great bundle of bedding with a lantern in its hand, stood waiting and moved on ahead of them.

Passing by the kitchen and around the stables, they came upon the row of servants' houses. A bonfire at the far end of the row lighted up their mud walls and the yards enclosed with matting in front of each one. Samuel sat on the ground by the fire, a child asleep in his arms. Two older children sat beside him, wide awake, and the old grandmother crouched opposite, muttering to herself. The voice of the woman in labour came from within, that unmistakable voice of

childbirth. No one else was about, quiet and darkness reigned in each of the other houses.

Susan, leaning over the old woman by the fire, motioned Imogen to go in.

The single room of the house into which she entered was walled and roofed of mud. The only furniture was a narrow bed, upon which lay the woman. Dr Choula was bending over a pan that was boiling on a charcoal fire.

"Ai—ai—memsahib—ji," screamed the woman on the bed.

At the end of two hours Imogen went to the door of the hut with a bundle in her arms. Beyond the paddy fields that backed to the edge of the compound the sky was red. Only one star remained, shining. Little curling clouds of smoke rose here and there from other dwellings. Imogen hugged the bundle to her breast. It was so long since she had done this kind of work that she had forgotten, but she remembered now. A great warm, tremulous feeling welled up in her heart. She beckoned to the old grandmother who was fussing about a pot that she had put on the fire.

Jabbering wildly, the old woman came in a tottering run.

“Boy? Mis’ab? Boy?” she cried grabbing the bundle.

Imogen nodded.

There was nothing more to do just now. Samuel had been told the news before, and had disappeared. Susan was gone too, to bed perhaps. The sun was rising.

Imogen stood outside, waiting. Excitement and exaltation possessed her.

The doctor came presently, and they turned and walked towards the house together.

“But I thought you were in Hazratpur district?” she said.

“I was. I’ve just come in for a day or two to get helpers. Will you come?”

“Yes,” promptly, and then, “what for?”

“You will have to get permission from Mrs Digby. There is a good deal of plague.”

“I shall come.”

“Mrs Trueman would bring you and take care of you.”

“I went to see her yesterday.”

“And what do you think of her?”

“What do you?”

“I think she’s the real thing.” His tone was short.

She was silent. Mrs Trueman had been discovered on her verandah surrounded by a group of her Bible women, gentle, uncouth creatures with very black eyes under their white cotton *chudders*. She had taken Imogen into a bare, fireless drawing-room. There were illuminated scriptural texts on the wall and a harmonium in one corner of the room. The thin inadequate muslin curtains that hung in the long windows were the only attempt at homeliness. Imogen had sat for half an hour in that chill drawing-room and had come away with no lightening of her load. Yes—it was real—too real. That brisk, nervous battered woman, with her quick decisive speech and her sudden, unexpected bursts of feeling; she carried it all written on her face, the disappointment, the fighting, the toil, that he had spoken about.

“She wept over me,” Imogen brought out at last. “Because she said with my youth and beauty, I could do what she never could do, and I wouldn’t. She nodded her little erect head at

me and her bright eyes filled with tears. She walked round me when I first came in. 'My dear, my dear,' she said, 'let me have a look at you. Oh, you darling, you sight for sore eyes.' It was, you know, sort of awful, to think she should get so much pleasure out of my looks and my clothes. And then later she came back to it differently. 'Yes,' she said, just like that, in her decisive way, 'you've been to that child,' she meant Fulmani, 'you've been to her with your youth and beauty, what I have never been,' and then she wept."

They had reached the house. "I suppose you won't come in and have some breakfast."

"No, thanks. It's only six."

They eyed one another, and their impersonal oneness went from them suddenly.

"Those books," she said, "I found them a bore."

"Of course."

"Why, of course? I want to know. I think the central idea of Hinduism is beautiful. I always have."

"What idea?"

"The worship of sex."

He scowled. "But that isn't the central idea of Hinduism. There isn't any, and the worship of the fact of life and birth is different."

"But surely—what of all these sacred emblems—these shrines—the sacred Lingam of Shiva—aren't they just the symbols of an ancient and beautiful idea?"

He shook his head.

"There may have been a first immaculate idea. I don't know, but there are no symbols or idols in the Vedas. These shrines to Shiva are the symbols of a depraved priesthood, symbols of sensuality."

"I don't believe it."

He laughed and she flushed.

"Look around you," he said, "look, see what these idols are, what they actually do."

"Oh, dear——"

"It's the way with all religions. Their spawn is priest-craft. Priestcraft produces idols and the idol obscures for ever the spirit that breathed truth in the beginning."

He broke off staring into his cap and growing suddenly self-conscious.

“ When is Mrs Trueman going ? ” she asked, to relieve him.

“ In a day or two. As soon as she can hand over her classes to some one else.”

“ But she doesn’t know any medicine, does she ? ”

“ Not much, only what she’s picked up. But she can nurse and there’s lots else to do. There are the bereaved families, and the children, and then—there is the panic to quiet. That really is the most serious thing.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Well, for the canal—for Concannon. He’s rather got into hot water and he can’t afford not to put this piece of work through. The P.W.D. are beginning to think of him as a kind of scapegoat.”

“ Poor Bobbie.”

He stared at her hard. Don’t——” he began and stopped short.

She flushed and he turned away, awkward and lumbering, and though she waited for him to say good-bye, he didn’t say anything more. He looked shabby and queer as he walked off, with that little round cap on top of his dark head, and those clumsy boots appearing below the

trousers that were too short for his long legs. There was something painful about his walk, and the bend of his head. He had a strained grim quiet about him, like a man in pain, he must be suffering all the time. Never had she seen him quite at ease, but always labouring as though under a weight. Only when he was at work, then he prevailed.

Did he resent being an Indian? She had never thought of that. The fact of his colour had actually never struck her before. It presented itself now, however, unexpectedly enough, as of some importance. Would one mind? Supposing one were to marry him, would it make any real difference? Could one? Why not? She stared at the idea, fascinated.

There was a fire in her bedroom, and her bed had been smoothed down. Sue must have done it. There was no one else about. Sue had looked so tired, too tired. Those blue shadows around her eyes were bad. She had been looking ill for days. What was the matter with her? If only one could get through that little icy barrier.

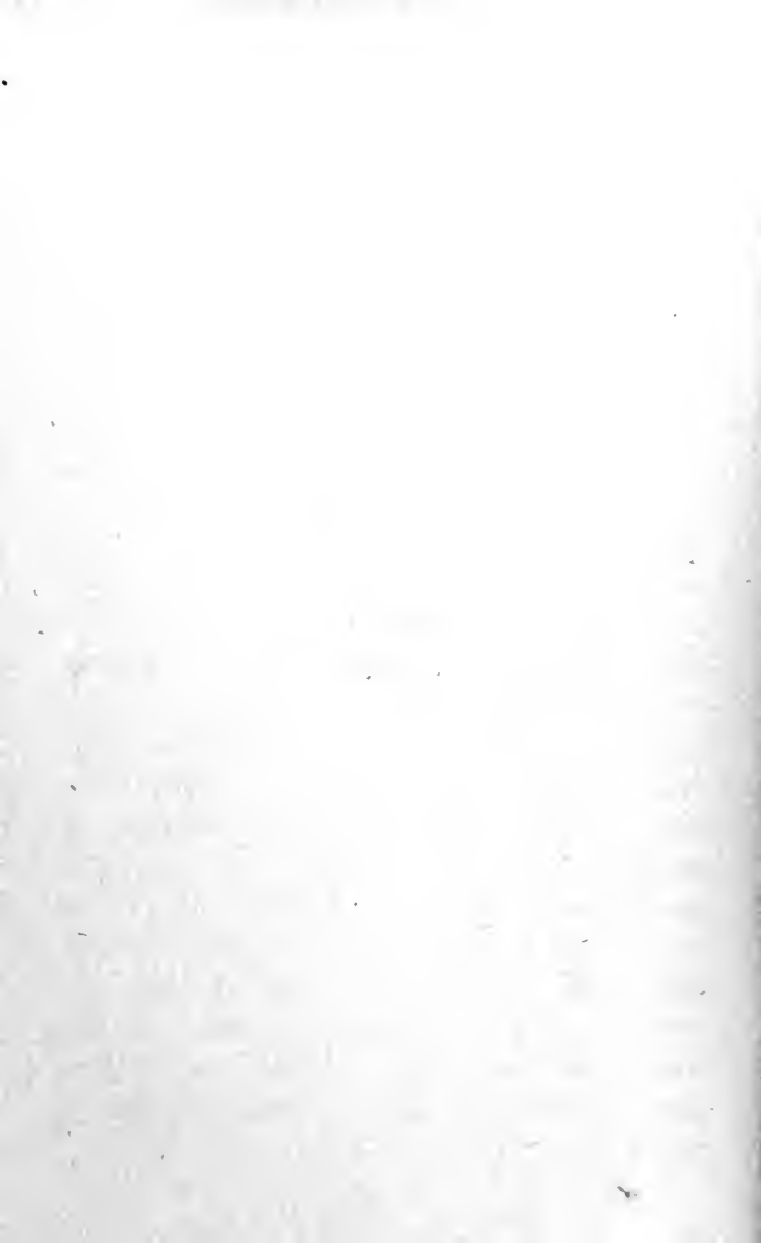
The idea of marrying was so different from falling in love. She could have fallen in love

with Digby if she had let go. In spite of Sue, that was the awful thing.

Perhaps Sue knew. The idea of Sue being jealous presented itself as monstrous and absurd. And yet? It seemed more difficult than ever to talk to Sue now.



PART III
DIGBY



CHAPTER I

AT seven o'clock on a February morning in the Punjab, it is cold. Under the cloak of an unhealthy darkness, thickened with mists that rise from the flooded fields in the night, frost takes possession of the gardens, and like the Punjab people who burrow down into their hooded blankets against the poison of the night air, the roses in the gardens shrivel into themselves and wait, fearfully, for the fresh healing touch of the sun. The native city, where, since sundown, every Oriental tenement has been sealed against those chill vapours, wakes slowly and reluctantly. From the top, downwards, it begins to wake, as the pale but inevitable sun touches first the highest roofs, then drops down upon the lower house-tops quickening those human nests one by one into activity. And long after the woman on her sunlit perch has begun to cook the morning meal, the streets lie dark and chill, like snakes, asleep.

At seven o'clock in the morning on the 15th of February, a very plump little man looking not unlike a two legged sheep, with his shawl wrapped about his head and shoulders, so that only two short legs appeared beneath that ball of wool, ambled down the main bazaar that lies outside the city wall, and stopped at a food shop. Standing in the road, he smelt pleasurably from within the folds of his shawl, of the great bowls from which a spicy aroma and gay clouds of steam rose into the frosty air. The keeper of the food shop and his sons were already at work. The glow of a red fire showed in the back of the shop, and a small boy, squatting on his haunches, was slapping a round disc of dough vigorously between his palms.

The woolly man, standing before the steaming cauldrons, addressed the shop-keeper with a single grunt; and producing a small brass bowl from within the folds of his garment, held it for the latter to fill from a larger vessel of the same kind. The customer stood a moment with the bowl of warm, spiced milk in his hand, and his very kind little eyes peering brightly through the round aperture of his blanket, rested on the shop-keeper contemplatively; and the shop-

keeper, crouching behind his wares, stared too, in silence.

There were other swathed figures in the bazaar now, mournful congealed figures that moved slowly, heads buried, legs bare beneath their blankets. A sacred bull, too, proceeded down the thoroughfare with a great swaying of his sleek sides, and stopping before a stall of vegetables, helped himself unmolested to a bunch of frosted carrots.

"May you have many sons, brother," said the customer at the food shop, draining his bowl of warm milk.

"Of your mercy," murmured the shop-keeper. "The gods have blest my house."

The other cocked his huge, hooded head to one side.

"And our neighbour, the son of a pig, does his voice still rise to the prophet in thanksgiving?"

The shop-keeper nodded.

"He grows fat, and he marries his daughter to a Maulvi. All the day long does he jingle his coins in my ears. The folk of this place are possessed of the Evil Spirit of vanity. They buy watches from him and false eyes. In one

day he has sold by the evidence of my own seeing, ten pairs of spectacles."

The customer with his head still cocked to one side, smiled and rubbed his hand slowly around under his shawl.

"For me, I would rather fill my belly." He sighed profoundly. "This desire for spectacles is but the desire to be beautiful in the eyes of their women." He laid a copper on the floor of the shop; he waited a moment, then he moved away.

Slowly he wandered down the bazaar. There were more people abroad now. A goat-herd was milking some goats at a corner for waiting customers.

Where the bazaar joins the lower end of the mall, by the market, the purposeless figure paused, and turned about slowly. On the verandahs of the post office were gathered some postmen in scarlet coats. A tonga stood there, the driver huddled miserably on the front seat. He unfolded suddenly as a round figure jumped into the back of the vehicle.

"Commissioner-Sahib ki Kothi ko."

The tonga-wala leaned forward, slapping the reins over the back of his forlorn beast.

“Run, thou mare, thou female child of a pig.”

The tonga lurched down the road.

.

Colonel Digby at half-past seven was in his study, shaved and clothed and at work. The room was cold and dark. A lamp with a green shade made a circle of light on the roll top desk. A tray of tea things had been pushed across the floor into a corner.

At six o'clock every morning Samuel, the bearer, coughed twice in the Colonel's study, and the Colonel with a great upheaval of bedding rose from his bed, wrapped himself in a Jaeger dressing-gown, and tip-toed gigantically out of his wife's room. Samuel, in the meantime, had lighted the lamp and placed a tray with a large earthenware tea-pot, a cup, and a pile of toast, on the table; Colonel Digby drank four cups of tea and played for half an hour with his specimens, those little bottled worms of his. He called them his “harem,” and named them, after his lady friends. One particularly large and splendid specimen, recently donated by Annandale, had been neatly labelled “Moggie,” with a printed label pasted round the bottle.

His collection was beginning to be valuable. He planned some day to bestow it upon a museum, and thus enshrine all the women he had ever loved, in perpetuity.

At half-past six, Samuel, who had in the meantime been goading on the *Bhistee*, shouted from the bathroom that the bath was ready. Such promptness on the part of Samuel had not come to that native Christian with his mother's milk. Slowly and painfully, week after week, it had been produced in him. For months, shaking with palsy under the terrific blast of his Sahib's roars, he had run to do his blasphemous bidding, and for months, mournfully, he had gazed upon that red face, with its terrible blue eyes that saw to the bottom of one's sickening soul, and its moustache the colour of ripe corn ; in terror, and adoring him with superstitious awe, had achieved perfection.

And Digby, who was a profane man, showed his affection for the same Samuel by his particularly fluent use of blasphemous language. The master and man understood one another.

Again, at half past seven, Samuel coughed. The Colonel grunted.

“ Gopi Chand Huzoor.”

“Hum ! Let him in.”

There was a sound of someone scraping off his shoes on the verandah, and the enhanced bulk of Gopi Chand's blanketed figure squeezed through the curtained doorway.

“Salaam Huzoor.”

“Salaam.”

Digby glared. Gopi Chand unwound his shawl. His round face wrinkled into a smile, his little eyes gleamed brightly, he showed all his white teeth.

“The milk of the Hindu food shop in the Hira Mundi is sweet.” He smacked his lips.

“Hum—and that neighbour of his, is his milk sweet also ? ”

“Mohammed Shah, cursed son of a swine-herd,” said Gopi Chand pleasantly, “waxes fat. His cheeks hang down with fatness. He laughs. The horn of the ram has been to him a source of fatness. May his soul wander in the body of a eweless ram for a thousand years.”

“Enough—what's he doing ? ”

“All the day long he jingles his money in his money box, and sells spectacles made of the horn that is accursed.”

“And our friends in the jungle? Do they wear spectacles?”

“My belly is sore. But last night I crawled to a gathering in the Saila village. One hundred there were, with sore eyes, one hundred who had dropped coins into the blasphemous box of Mohammed Shah, who waxes fat.”

“And your Sahib, how much does he know of what’s in the minds of these people?”

Gopi Chand rolled his eyes upwards, till only the whites were visible.

“He is blind, Huzoor. His eyes are fixed on the sun and he cannot see. And how should the son of one born the other side of the moon, know what these children of Kali, the blood-drinking, are plotting in their hearts?”

“Are they all Hindus.”

“No, Huzoor. The Ganges and the Indus have turned, they flow together. The followers of the prophet and the children of the Vedas alike, have sore eyes.”

“How’s that?”

The little man spread out his hands. “Who am I, Sahib-ji, to interpret the flowing of the Ganges and the Indus?” He crossed his hands

over his stomach. "But the lust of the belly is great, Huzoor." He sighed.

There was a silence during which Gopi Chand stood still with his hands comfortably crossed on his stomach and Digby stared at the floor. There was no doubt that the strike was progressing. Trotter knew all there was to know about organizing a strike, and Badri Nath, if anyone, could play on the greed and superstition of the people. Damn! They had chosen well. The Canal (*-Patwaris*) were just intelligent enough and just superstitious enough for their scheme. But the money?—Funds seemed to be coming from somewhere. They would have to guarantee strike pay, more likely have to pay them ahead, to get them to strike. Bribery must be going on wholesale. Where did the money come from? It was not like a native millionaire to hand over the cash. Trotter was not getting it from home. Not a letter had reached him in any way relating to the matter. His own bank account was small. Some foreigners must have a share in it. Gad, a certain potentate of Europe might play a very good game here."

There was a cough from the discreet round man.

“ Well ? ”

“ The Mountains of Tibet are full of gold, Huzoor.”

“ What ? Talk, plain talk.”

“ There is a man who makes long marches who knows Tibet, who speaks many tongues ; he too wears spectacles.”

“ That is fool’s talk. He dreams. His head is in the clouds that cap the Himalayas.”

Gopi Chand sighed.

“ He is not of our people, Huzoor.”

“ Whose people ? ”

“ Yours and mine, Huzoor.”

“ What the deuce ? Nonsense. The idea was absurd. Shalieb was a fanatic. Still one might use him to find out.”

“ There is just one more thing, Huzoor. I found it in Trotter’s Sahib’s pocket.” He held out a pale pink slip of paper. Then he waited. With his hands crossed again on his stomach—he waited a long time. There was a lizard hanging head-downwards over the lamp. If it dropped it would be consumed in fire and its soul would seek refuge in the body of a snake.

The Commissioner Sahib looked up, the piece of pink paper shaking like a leaf, in his hand.

His face was yellow, mottled with red and purple.

“You have done well,” he said, taking his moustache between his teeth, his voice sounding as though someone had hands on his throat. “More cheques. You understand? This is a small one. There must be more. Watch.” He stopped and took hold of the arms of his desk chair and they cracked under his hands. “And now get out, quick,” he roared suddenly. “You have done well I say—now go.”

Gopi Chand waited no longer. He remembered having seen the Sahib like this once before, five years ago. What followed had been like a typhoon and an earthquake, and, shaking all over his fat body, he sought to put his feet into his shoes on the verandah. There were terrible sounds in the study. Then silence. He listened, rolling his eyes.

CHAPTER II

IT was not in the nature of things that George Digby should take women seriously. There had been no women in his childhood. During the first ten years of his life there had been only horses and dogs and grooms and a black satin housekeeper with a moustached lip; and his uncle, who had been his guardian and had fulfilled the function of that office by teaching him the refined art of blasphemy. Men and horses and dogs, were to him, individuals, wild animals, the mistresses of his imagination. Women were just women, and until Susan Maclanahan flashed upon the barbaric darkness of his soul, he had never thought about them. Requiring them at times, he took the trouble occasionally to beat one into submission with the shillalegh of his powerful and primitive need, never buying their graces, for he delighted in the romance of robbery and loathed the market place; but none had troubled the course of his driving ambition, none had held even his attention, until a certain lady

had turned her head toward him lightly and had dropped into his boisterous gloom, a little sparkling jewel of wit. Then, as some old viking transported suddenly from his firelit, laughter-ringing banquet hall, into the presence of a lovely Victorian maiden, would stare dumb-founded, so did Digby the modern Titan of bonfire dreams and blind desires, halt astounded before the dainty person of his lady.

That loud laughing country squire, his uncle, had sent him to a public school, suggesting a life of sporting ease to follow, but one day in the paddock at the Hermitage there was a row, and George had thereupon, in the presence of two grooms, broken his uncle's head against the gate-post.

He had been turned off next day with a few hundreds in the bank and ten thousand devils in his heart. Those devils had stayed by him. Always, while he sweated to get into the Civil Service, he had been conscious that they were there; and though he had managed to get through Oxford without displaying the fiends, they menaced him. He began to remember and became aware of them—backwards, as it were, grotesque presences in his babyhood. Once he

had bitten the housekeeper and had pounded her ugly features with his four-year-old fists. At college, the sight of her scarred and terror-stricken face came back to him. The faces of the grooms too, in the paddock with that same appalling terror upon them. Indeed, everyone he had ever known well, it seemed, had shown that face of horror, sooner or later. Only Susan Maclanahan's countenance had refused it.

He had, from his first blinding sight of her, been a quaking lover. Healthy, horsey women he had known, and exotic creatures with long cheeks and marvellous busts ; but her incomparable quality of racy daintiness he had never known. Accustomed to a glare, he blinked before her gentle and limpid sparkle, as he had been astonished in the first instance by her very sweet, concentrated way of putting things. It was as though that little jewel of her wit had begun to burn inside him, lighting up the world with new, elusive beauties, where he had seen before only the dark outline of the concrete foreground. And because she was such a will-o'-the-wisp, he was afraid.

During those five years, while he besieged her fortress and lost it, like a dream thing, and be-

sieged again ; he had waited for it to come, the ugly revelation that would destroy his dream for ever, knowing at the same time that he could never enfold her reality until she had the full evidence before her.

He had told her, of course, but what could he say ? How could he describe it ? Call it one's quick temper, one's fits of rage ? What were you to call it ? She could never know until the one unspeakable thing happened, which he swore would never happen. It did.

He had crawled to her afterward, a tortured mass of self-loathing, to say that he would give up his pursuit of her now, and she, oh merciful and unknowable heavens ! had thrown herself into his arms and had laughed and cried and said that she knew now and was ready to marry him.

She had become suddenly and miraculously real. He could remember it perfectly, that day after the disgrace. They had gone for a ride and had dismounted on the top of a bluff above the sea. She wore a grey habit, and her cheeks were pale, and there were freckles on her nose, and her eyes were big and her hair blown. He had discovered lots of wonderful new things about her that day, partly because he knew it

might be the last time, partly because he had never seen her so vividly, a real flesh and blood thing before. He had noticed how wide apart her eyes were, and how close-set her ears, and how lovely the line under her chin. And then she had proceeded to talk. She believed in the Devil now, she said, and they would fight him together. It would not be easy, but she was not afraid. If he were willing, she would make his menace her own—only he must understand. He must never resent her help. That was the difficulty. He must love her enough not to be ashamed. It would take great love and great restraint.

He had understood as he helped her to mount again that she would ride him for the rest of her life, and with the sense of her flower-like mouth on his own, he had been then overwhelmed with unspeakable relief. She had done what she promised. Constantly, without one break in ten years, she had been there with that small hand of hers on the reins, guiding him with a touch so light that he scarcely noticed it after a while. How light she had been to carry. That was what had made it possible—and yet there had been days when he had struggled

with a sense of shame. To acknowledge his need was terrible to him, and at first, with all her lightness, he had felt at times like taking the bit in his teeth, but when the child was born and she had clung to him in agony with those white hands of hers, he had begun to lose it all, his pride and shame, and when the child died and she had gone down into despair, the last of it had ebbed away—for ever he thought.

He depended upon her now without reservation, and she had been dependable. For ten years she had not left him; six hot summers she had spent on the plains, refusing each time to go to the hills, with that little final closing of her lips, and now at the end of those ten years, he was in the running for the next Lieutenant-Governorship.

And, of course, the proof of it all was, that not once in ten years had that Devil of his taken possession of him. The sight of her face had been enough to banish him when he showed his ugly head. And of late years he had been much less troublesome. Angry passions did not thrive in the same house with Sue.

But on that day, when Moggie had arrived

with Trotter, the same awful convulsive premonition had shaken him. Sue's eyes had battled for supremacy that day and hardly had they won. Trotter, ye gods! and here—and all that ghastly past that had never been paid for. Whenever his bristling head came into view he brought with him the image of that wretched woman, the bare abandoned room, the dead child. Digby had known her before; in her glory, before Trotter had sucked the blood from her cheeks, the light from her eyes. She had been a wild, sweet wicked thing, with just a spark of genius. He knew that now, because of what Sue was. Trotter had known it too, and had sucked it from her. He was a leech—a bloodless cur. One's hands itched at the sight of him. He had fastened on to Moggie. He had got a hundred pounds out of her, and how much more, good God!

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Digby sat absolutely still, after Gopi Chand had disappeared. Something within him told him not to move yet. To begin to be angry now would be fatal. There was work to do—lots of it—and there was breakfast to go through with that little stinking bit of paper in his pocket

and the same ten thousand devils kicking up a row in the pit of his stomach.

Sue was looking white. She must be having fever again and keeping mum about it as usual. Certainly she had lost a stone since last hot weather. How thin and worn she looked beside Imogen. She had no sparkle any more—she was getting old—India was taking the life out of her. God! why not chuck it? What was the use any way?

“Moggie is going to leave us,” said Susan, pouring out his second cup of coffee.

“What for?”

“She’s going into Hazratpur district with Mrs Trueman, to nurse.” Sue’s eyes questioned. She was waiting for him to take some definite line. He put her off.

His first feeling was one of relief. By all means let Moggie go. He didn’t want her in his study any more. She was an infernal nuisance. But he couldn’t let her go. Beside the plague and all that, Hazratpur was the centre of the whole trouble. He finished his coffee, wiped his moustache, and turned to Moggie.

“Well—you can’t go.”

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because I say so.”

She had the impudence to laugh. “ My dear George,” she drawled, “ I shall do just as I like.”

He watched the curve of her red lips. It was horrible, all the background, all the things that were in his mind and her mind, and Sue sitting there. A wave of heat fogged his eyes. Moggie would think—if he insisted on her staying—Damn ! What did it matter what she thought ?

He rose from the table.

“ I forbid you to go.”

Moggie started to rise too. He felt it, or saw it somehow with eyes in the back of his head as he went out, saw Sue lay a hand on her arm.

“ Moggie—Moggie dear,” sounded Sue’s sweet, suppressed voice.

It was his day for receiving Indian gentlemen, and already a number of assorted vehicles were waiting in the road. Let them wait. For the moment, from amidst the hot and turbulent discord of his mind the plain loathing of his position rose uppermost. It was not Imogen’s red lips alone that worried him, but the things she harped on. Mad as she was, and damned

impertinent, there was still something in what she said. He was not honest. He did not really like these natives. With the exception of Kashi Ram there was not one that he really knew. He was as much a humbug as any of the grinning, salaaming Rai-sahibs who came to him with their greasy smiles to work him. There were things to be done in India, big things, but he couldn't do them. Damn it, Trotter and Imogen between them made him feel like a large calf tied up for slaughtering. They were free at least—so was Shalieb; free to follow out an Idea. Every idea that had come to him out of those sweltering, stinking plains of the Punjab, he had smothered with work. He was there to do his duty as a government servant, and the only outlet that he had for his own brain was in his little bottle of worms and his few Persian manuscripts. What did it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul. Sue had quoted that once. Perhaps Sue would help him to cut loose. There were things he could do. There was that native-state job, that or the Lieutenant-Governorship. In another five years he wouldn't have the gumption to do it. He would care more than anything else for a

fat pension. He would get for himself and Sue a house somewhere, in Ealing or Tonbridge Wells, a little house, with a strip of garden. He would water his geranium with a watering-can every morning, and he would want his slippers warmed by the fire every evening, and he would sit there, by his little English grate and the other (*Koi-Hais*) would come in and they would talk about India as the "field of cloth of gold." God! but it was stupid.

And Sue would have given her youth and her radiance, and all the strength of her body and her mind, just for that.

"George, dear." Her voice was compressed and intensely sweet. She came in with her hat on, a white veil fell from it framing the girlish oval of her face. Her eyes were very big and dark in the dim light of the study.

"George—I am going out. Do you want me for anything?"

He didn't move; he couldn't. He was a large calf tied up to a stake—no, he wasn't. He was a child, a great big blithering child. If he moved he would perhaps yell. She came closer, searching his face, and to get out of the way of her eyes he rose to his feet.

“Oh, my dear, my dear,” she murmured, standing against him, her hands on his shoulders.

Pain shot through him, thousands and thousands of volts of pain. She was paying for him all the time, she was starving to give him food. And he was to come to nothing. He was breaking up. His foundations had cracked already. He felt them going. Imogen had done it, and Trotter. No, not they. What then? The clinging of Sue’s fingers was terrible.

Then she was gone. Like a leaf blown away from the wall against which it had fluttered for a moment, she was gone.

“Rai Sahib, Badri Nath, Huzoor,” said the Chuprassi’s voice.

Still those continuing currents of pain in his heart. He heard Sue’s carriage drive away from the door.

CHAPTER III

It was with absolute calm that he received Badri Nath, a calm so superficial and so rigid, and so extraordinary to himself, lasting as it did through those two interviews that led up to the summoning of Imogen, that it deceived him and put him off his guard. His mind was reeling and yet clairvoyant. Many things swirled before his eyes while he listened lucidly to what was said. He realized that there was a string of native gentlemen waiting outside who would go away smirking with diabolically concealed wrath, that would work like yeast in the dough of the lump of malcontents. He saw into the depths of that oriental soul of Badri Nath, and he saw it full of weird passions and slippery meaningless sins like stingless snakes, and he saw far beyond this one man, into a great tangled snarl of men and powers and uncontrollable happenings; and he saw dust and heat and dark sweating faces and some blood and more dust and more heat. He could have sworn,

by the evidence of that surging of blood in his head, that it was the middle of the hot weather. So clear was he as to this, that while he sat there, facing, first Badri Nath then Mrs Trueman, he could see the punkah swaying overhead quite plainly. He kept thinking that he would have to send for Imogen to come to the study, and knew that her mouth would flame like a red hot coal in the shadow of the room. And all the time, parallel with this, while the punkah went on swaying overhead and making him dizzy, he felt his fluttering wife resting lightly in his arms, cool and sweet, and he knew that he was just crazy with the heat in his head, and that if he could only keep motionless, he would be safe in the shell of that miraculous calm that encased him.

It took the Indian less time than usual to come to the point. There was some preamble about higher Education in India and the position of Indian women students, and then it came out, suddenly. His daughter had run away. There was no expression of feeling on the man's square thick face. His spectacles as usual hid his eyes. He sat quiet, with a hand on each knee, his head slightly averted, staring somewhere no doubt,

unless his eyes behind those discs of very dark glass were closed.

Digby said nothing. There was more to come ; there always was. If he asked a question, the game was up. Silence and silence alone would drag from the Oriental the real burden of his message. So worked the mechanism of his mind, automatically, with the immediate situation, while he perceived dreadfully the lurking realities behind.

He remained sitting quite still, fascinated by the contemplation of that soul before him. All that he had learned of the Indians in twenty years, rushed back to him now to light up this man with extraordinary clearness. It was as though his own excitement made a kind of X-ray to expose the individual before him. Badri Nath was a mass of ancient, decayed and diseased superstitions that had once been beautiful. He was smeared over with an opulent modernity, but inside he was beginning to decompose. His English necktie bore a pearl scarf pin, his under-linen was not. Digby exulted. Entrenched behind that Oriental pomposity was a chaos of little meannesses and cruelties, and the hour had come for Badri Nath to give himself away.

Together they sat and stared at the fact of Fulmani's disappearance, and Digby saw it uncurl like the genius out of the water-pot, and float up over his head in a sinister cloud. He divined what it was that threatened them in the fact before Badri Nath voiced anything more. Imogen was responsible. Of course she was responsible. She was responsible for everything. Undoubtedly, as the Indian suspected, she had given the girl money, and knew where she was. She was a destructive and devastating thing. Mad on these Ideas of hers, she thought to make others see her Idea—but they saw only her red mouth, and her creamy skin, and her daring eye. She was drink. All of them had tasted of her, even Fulmani and himself, and they were all mad.

The study was terribly close, in spite of the punkah that he still felt waving overhead. The sun slanted hurtlingly through the cracks in the straw curtain.

He knew that Imogen was now uppermost in both their thoughts, and he waited for the Indian to betray the hideous emptiness of his mind. He waited, gloating over the superb object of his dignity ; and it came, inevitably,

as he had foreseen—only it was more, much more, than he had expected.

Badri Nath had not spoken for half an hour. He opened his lips.

“She will come back,” he said. “She is not beautiful like the other, she has a deformity.”

His race on the instant became noisome, and yet, in his bestiality, he was separated from all of humankind.

And he sat there, the monstrosity, as composed as any gentleman uttering a platitude. He sat there and after a while with the image facing him, Digby began to laugh, and he went on laughing unsteadily with his head between his hands and the room swaying round him, while the other with perfect dignity departed.

It was then that Mrs Trueman rustled in. She was so definite, and so terribly upset, poor silly woman, that she steadied the room on its foundations. Her hair hung in dusty wisps from under her topi. Her face was drawn and her eyelids red. She spoke in her usual, decisive, dictatorial way.

She had a clue and was off to Jhaijar. Fulmani had been seen only last evening in the railway station with one of the medical students,

a good-for-nothing boy, the son of that man who was mixed up with the Arya Somaj divorce business. If Fulmani were in the hands of that lot, she would want the help of the police—and she herself must have a warrant for the man's arrest. Would he give her a note to the Chief of Police, and himself wire all over the place to the station-masters and so on.

She seemed to him absurd, and that helped him. If one could only see the whole damned thing as funny. The Indian girl had not gone off with a medical student. She had gone off on some business for Imogen. He told Mrs Trueman so, but the idiotic woman didn't believe him. She had tasted of Imogen, too, and she drew her little wizened self up very straight and said no, very decidedly, that Miss Daunt had nothing to do with it. She knew that, from the latter's own lips.

Ah well—if Miss Daunt had said so. But how had she known anything about it at all?

The girl had gone to her and she had merely listened and done nothing.

Hum! He doubted that. It was too unlike Miss Daunt. Anyhow, he would write her a

note to Brown, the Chief of Police, and another to MacPherson, who would work the railway side of it.

She was gone at last, with her notes. He never could see what Sue liked in her. She was too "country." There was a touch of the tar-brush in her blood certainly.

There were now two rounds of ammunition which he could fire off at Imogen. It would be good to see her hit, to make her squirm, to draw blood.

She came and sat again on the corner of his desk and swung her large clumsy foot. She had on a blouse with red dots all over it, and a red collar that rolled back from an open throat. Her throat was massive like the throat of an animal, and brown with a glow of red underneath the brown.

"Well—what do you want?" she said abruptly.

Her voice was low and heavy. Only a small portion of it came through her lips. He could hear its undertones vibrating in that deep chest of hers under the thin blouse with the red spots. She was deep chested and narrow hipped, and sitting bent on the top of the desk, one could see

the rise and fall of her breathing under her uncorseted waist.

"I have something of yours." He picked up the pink slip of paper, very quietly and nonchalantly he thought, and handed it to her, waiting for her shadowed eyelids to quiver and the blood to flood her face.

She looked at it a moment and then slashed him with her eyes. How small her eyebrows were, and the case of her eyes, in proportion to the largeness of her face."

"Where did you get this?"

"It was given me."

"It was stolen."

"It was picked up by a servant."

"Well, what's it got to do with you?" She had not even flushed as yet.

"I want to know what you gave it to him for."

"That's none of your business." She half shut her eyes.

"No, it's Sue's business. If you were arrested, it would hurt her, especially if I were responsible for your arrest."

She opened her eyes wide with a slack mouth of wonder.

“What in the world are you talking about ? ”

“I’m only talking about what may happen. If you go on with this Trotter-Badri-Nath concern you will be incriminated with them.”

“Rubbish ! ”

He knew in that subconscious, lucid space beneath the waving heat of his uppermost mind, that this was a stupid and ridiculous game that he was playing. He was not really angry with her, nor afraid of what she would do with herself, it was merely the peculiar pungent quality of her person that whipped up those heat waves. In her relation to Trotter and the Badri Nath, and to all that tangle of dust and blood and evil, she was funny. Only in relation to himself, to that gnawing feeling inside him, was she a serious thing. And she did not know. She thought she was an important factor in the political and racial situation. She sat there with the backward balance of her long hips, that maddened him, and she was thinking—Good God—of saving India from himself, the Official Britisher and those of his ilk, and all the time, the most

she could do was make him into a beast, and break Sue's heart, and smash up her own life.

"And where is Fulmani," he demanded, ducking his head down and lowering up at her from under his eyebrows.

"I don't know."

"Oh, don't you? I like that. That sounds true, doesn't it? Well, nobody knows then—for her father doesn't." He began to laugh. She sat so still, so cool, so sure, he must make her wince somehow. "One can only imagine then, if you don't know. Let me see, in the quarters of an Indian student perhaps. She was seen with a particularly nice specimen—last—" He knew that he was acting like a filthy brute, but he laughed again. "It's funny how your influence shows itself. Badri Nath's clever daughter is now on the road to becoming a prostitute. You affect us all the same way, you know. You inoculate us with a germ. We don't care a damn for your ideas. We are smitten with a fever, that's all. It burns away our self-control. It makes us do things that we loathe afterwards."

She had gone white now—good! He was reaching her. That was all he wanted—to get at her somehow, and make her feel. More—more. He stood before her and muttered fast and thick, his head thrust out towards her.

“You preach socialism and the regeneration of mankind, and you come into this house and into my rooms and into my mind, and you make them all Hell—Hell—do you hear?”

He pressed closer, and she threw herself back on her hands.

There was lots more that he could say, if only his head were clear. What was it, he had had to say? The room swayed. He hesitated, moving his head from side to side and peering at her face that swam before him, her large creamy face with its scarlet lips.

Suddenly she was gone. He whirled about. She was at the door.

“I leave your house to-day, I will never come back.”

He only felt the heat and the swaying of the floor, and saw her there in the door, expanding

and contracting strangely like a figure in a nightmare. And then, as he opened his arms to crush her back into shape, to crush her and crush her, and hurt her and know that she was there, he found a reeling emptiness.



PART IV
SUE



CHAPTER I

AT twelve o'clock on the 15th of February, Colonel Digby kicked Benjamin Trotter out of his study door, down the drive and into the road. At twelve o'clock, too, a very sprightly lady renowned in Simla as a "raconteuse," was driving her trap by the gate, several of the more determined Indian gentlemen who had called that morning were still waiting in their carriages, and Mrs Digby herself was returning home in her victoria from a school prize-giving.

Everybody knew in the course of the day, what had happened and just how it had happened, just how the Colonel had taken the man by the collar and the belt, and had dragged him and pushed him, and propelled him with his knee down the drive and out of the gate. The lady in the trap had gone straight on down the road and had made twenty calls before two o'clock, and her story was distinctly funny. The picture that she drew could not have been dignified; under her touch it resembled the lusty absurdity

of a "Little Dutchman's" canvass. It glistened with dust and sun, and streams of perspiration and red distorted faces. It had for background a row of terror-struck and idiotic servants' countenances; it omitted the white face of Susan Digby in the foreground.

Everyone recognized the absurdity of the catastrophe; Trotter was a sufficiently well-known figure for that, but strangely enough few laughed or even smacked lips of scandal-pleased appetite. There was just one fact that lifted it out of the delectable and into the appalling; the same fact which the raconteuse had so significantly omitted, namely, Susan Digby's terribly close connection with this thing.

At six o'clock, assembled together in the Gymkhana, with the opportunity of the season within their grasp, they failed to seize it. Something kept them still. They murmured to one another, a brief word of it, as they passed back and forth from the coffee table, but for the most part, lolling in wicker chairs, they talked conspicuously of other things, their faces, especially the men's faces, stamped with that subtle negation of curiosity or of understanding or even of bare intelligence, which is the English-

man's pledge of fine feeling, and often, one or another looked apprehensively at the open door.

She came at half-past six, as was her wont when she was in the station; and with her appearance in the great doorway, a little shiver of human feeling passed over the gathering.

It was not a dancing night. There was no music and no movement to form a cloak for her. The Middleton girl, who was having a very serious flirtation on the stairs, grew quite white, and looked at her hands for a full minute in silence. A group of youths outside the door of the bar, huddled closer together in an agony of self-consciousness. Faces grew pink, or red, eyes shifted, feet moved a little nervously, and a hundred people chained to their chairs tried to express something inexpressible—the recognition of her indomitable pluck.

She used to say afterwards, that she had felt it all, in that one moment while she hesitated, facing the long expanse of empty carpet, the vast vaulted glittering hall and the sea of hats and faces. Her courage for a moment failed her, she went weak suddenly, and cold, and had an impulse to bury her face in her hands, and then in a rush, it came to her out of their midst,

out of their eyes that fled from hers, out of that silence of theirs that had seemed so terrible, the knowledge that she, and he too, belonging to her and to them as he did, had their sympathy. She had surrendered then to their charity.

They opened a way for her between the crowded chairs, timidly smiling and saying good-evening, and their embarrassment warmed her. She remembered the first time, ten years ago, when she had entered that hall as a bride, the weakness of her knees, the impression of brilliant coldness she had received. It seemed quite wonderful to her that the Gymkhana should be at last a refuge. The nice wild Middleton girl, who it occurred to her was in love with Bobbie Concannon, came running down the stairs to chatter and laugh about something, and at her signal they all rallied round, all those young things that she had doted on. Bless the children for their loyalty.

She drank a cup of coffee, which one of Moggie's pink-cheeked admirers brought to her, timidly, and then went on to the library to return some books. Altogether, she only stayed half an hour for she wanted to get back to her husband, but that was enough ; she knew that it was enough

by the change in the hall when she came back on her way to her carriage. The silence had given way to a natural buzz of talk. A group of young men escorted her out on to the steps, and she smiled and told them that—yes, really, Miss Daunt was going into the district, and as she drove away, she smiled again to herself, even with that deadening pain at her heart; they were so sweet those boys and so in love with Moggie.

But the effort made, after all her energies had been spent in that long mental struggle with her husband, had been terribly great, and before she reached home, she had grown quite cold once more, and half-dead with apprehension. The evening air, with its mists and smoke, smelling of burning cow-dung, seemed sick to her and suffocating. She remembered with strange distinctness the way she used to feel before her child was born; when that smell of cow-dung fires had wrenched her with nausea. She had a feeling now somewhat akin to that deadly pressure. India had seemed horrible to her then, and India seemed more horrible to her now. If she could only take him away—why should she fight any more? Why not let him succumb?

He could do nothing big now. Even if, in its superb self-contained way, the Government of India, did nothing, left him alone, withheld so much as a rebuke, his influence with the Indians was gone. Benjamin Trotter was the friend of the Arya Somaj group. They could make much of this. They could use it as a brand to stir up feeling against not only himself, but the whole Punjab Government. And they would. Things were sure to happen, even terrible things. The fuse had been laid to the explosives long ago. Now it was lighted. And no one knew much about that hidden dynamite except George. No one would know what to do, and something would have to be done. If they went on leave—? There was no going on leave. There was simply nothing to do but stay and see it through. They must, he must. If she could only say the right word to him, he would see. All the afternoon she had struggled to bring him back to his sane self—now there was something more to do—could she do any more?

She went into her room and took off her hat. There seemed to be no one about. Where was George? A panic seized her. Nonsense! She would rest for a moment before seeking him.

Lying on her back, she closed her eyes and thought about it, trying to find out through the agonizing contemplation of that ghastly former scene, what to do now.

He had staggered back to the house, leaving Trotter sprawling in the road, and she had followed his lurching progress and had pressed through the door of his study after him. Plastering herself against it, she had waited in silence, and oh, the agony that she had endured, watching his mottled, distorted face come and go before her as he tramped the room, head forward, swinging from side to side like a mad dog. Holding her breath there, she had prayed. At least she supposed she must have prayed. Her lips had moved silently, and in silence she had said over and over again—"Save him, bring him back. Bring him back. Bring him back."

She had no idea how long he had gone on tramping up and down. At last she almost swooned and closed her eyes, and then she felt his hot breath close against her face and opened her eyes into his, that were bloodshot and terrible. He was standing still at last, and he burst out at her.

"Cover up your God-damned white face. It

makes me wild." Then he flung off again and began again walking up and down, but turning his head towards her every now and then.

After that she kept her gaze fixed on his face, and every time he looked at her, she met his eyes and held them, and each time held them a little longer, just a fraction of a second longer. He would stop and then go on slower, he would stop again held by her eyes and go on again still slower, until at last he stopped altogether and dropped into a chair, staring at her and muttering. She strained to hear the thick words, searching in them for a clue that would tell her how to go on.

"Why do you stand there, I want to know, like a God-forsaken image of the Madonna. Who are you anyway? You're my wife, are you? Why don't you speak to me? If you spoke to me I could hit you and let loose some of these devils. You know what I mean. You're my wife, You know, don't you? You know, don't you? I've only lost my temper, you know, don't you—those red hot devils."

"Yes, I know," she had said at last. "I knew long ago—ten years ago." She waited, and he made no sign, staring at her face now,

haggard and awful in his growing quiet, pitiful in his dumb and sudden appeal. She went on.

“I saw you like this before—and after that I married you, and we vowed it was never to happen again, and now it has happened. But still I am here, I knew before and I married you, remember. I know now and still I am here. Do you understand? I shall always be here.”

The great helpless look on his face was growing. She remembered what he had told her of his childhood, and she knew that he must have looked like this, after he had been flogged and turned out of the Hermitage. Slowly he drank from her eyes. She could see him drinking in relief, and she felt, too, something going out of her. Shame would come now. Slowly it was all crumbling away. She must not move yet, not until all that uncanny look was gone, not until he melted into himself.

Then suddenly it happened. It broke. His face worked terribly. His chest heaved. A great shouting sob took him, and she sped into his arms.

It had been an hour after that before she could leave him—and then she had gone to the Gymkhana, and now she was terribly tired. . . .

She was awakened out of her exhaustion by her ayah, who told her that the Miss-sahib had gone away that afternoon with her bedding, and had not returned. Her mind refused to register the momentary shock of the news. She was incapable of worry or foreboding. There was only one thing to think about, only one thing to do, only one person in existence. Instinctively, saving for him the last drop of her mental energy, she dismissed Moggie from her mind.

To-night they were dining at Government House, to-morrow they were going into camp, next week was the great mela at Hazratpur, the week after, the wedding of the young Rajah of Jhilu. She faced a series of ordeals more appalling even than that braving of the crowd at the Gymkhana, because the excitement of the crisis had carried her through that, and now the crisis was past, and she was left high and dry. She had not failed in the crisis, but she was quite capable of failing to carry the thing through afterwards. When the drop came, and there was time to think, to analyze, to doubt, then she was in danger and he with her. If there was one thing that had nearly killed her in her marital task, it had been its continuous

uneventfulness, the fact that nothing had ever happened, that the catastrophe had always moved on ahead of them. During that one catastrophic hour, she had experienced something akin to exaltation. It was gone, and she must begin again, just to hold on, silently. She loathed silence, and caution, and she loathed the habitual, daily sameness of consistent conduct, and she was involved now in a consistent policy of silence and vigilant carefulness.

She began to dress very carefully for dinner. The process of doing her hair and choosing a gown assumed, in itself, the character of an ordeal, and she shrank before it. It was fun once in a while to have an orgy of clothes, and it was fun for the rest of the time to throw on anything, but now to have to think what kind of an impression she must make, was terrible.

She hesitated miserably among her gowns. They all looked draggled and stupid. Most of them had the mark of the native tailor on them somewhere. There was one good one that she had intended to wear, white satin with gold embroideries. She put it on and looked at herself in the glass. Her face was haggard. She began pulling feverishly at the hooks—"Take it

off, take it off," she cried to the ayah who was bouncing round chattering distractedly. It was all awful. She felt like screaming. To achieve that perfect mean between the presumptuous and the humble—to be quietly dressed and yet not in mourning. How was it to be done, and how ridiculous to do it anyway, and yet she could not afford to leave out any little thing that she might summon to her aid. This grey and green chiffon then and the green osprey. She could hear her husband moving about in his dressing-room. Her white face would intimidate him and weaken his defences. She rushed into Moggie's room. Her pallor would never do.

Moggie's dressing-table was a medley of scent-bottles and powder-puffs, and brushes and nail files. There was a little crimson wad of cotton there. She rubbed her cheeks with it very carefully.

Moggie's dressing-table possessed her mind as she drove through the dark beside her husband. It was untidy and soiled, and voluptuous. The medley of perfumes there and powders suggested a trained and extravagant taste in these things that she, with her one bottle of Eau de Cologne

and her rice-powder, had never dreamed of. It made her a little sick and a little angry. Moggie was an absurd child, but Moggie was a woman of the world. Moggie could carry off anything. She felt a pang.

CHAPTER II

LADY HOWARD'S A.D.C. looked gigantic at the head of the stairs, and the stairs seemed endless, and the corridor a day's journey. The drawing-room that was never in the cold weather comfortably warm, was to-night, freezing, and the manner of the hostess, always cold, seemed to have frozen into keeping with the temperature of the place.

Across a chill desert of chintz and plaster a group of women clung about the fire, warming their bare backs and arms. They made room for her elaborately, and eyed her up and down. Behind the piano Lady Howard's daughters were flirting with two of the Ninth Cavalry. Now and then a giggle trickled icily from their corner out into the atmosphere of the room. Surely the lack of mirth and of ease here was not all in her own mind. These very women had been in that quite different gathering in the Gymkhana, and yet they were not the same women. It was now the wife of the Chief Justice, and the wife

of the General in command of the Cantonment, and the wife of the Railway Manager, who eyed her frock. They were officials all. Officialdom reigned in the cavernous room, and her husband had sinned against officialdom.

A quarter of an hour passed while they waited for a late guest, during which she quaked or shivered, she did not know which, and watched her husband where he hulked with enormous discomfort in the doorway; and then, at last, he came, and it was Shalieb. He came in leaning forward and limping with a cane in each hand. His little beaming figure made the room warm suddenly, and they clustered round him as they had hung round the fire and he glowed upon them, and the official apartment which held them, dwindled into nothingness.

She stood a little aside after that first straight beam of welcome from his eyes to give the other devotees more room. He had telegraphed to her, and was with her, and she didn't care what any of them were feeling. Who were they and what were they all doing there, anyway, with their badly reproduced English drawing-rooms, their transplanted habits, their elaborate edifice of Government—he alone had a right there.

They were all imposters in India, but he with his frozen feet and peeling nose and ineffable smile, he had grappled with the East; *he belonged*. And suddenly she ceased to care, one tiny bit, whether her husband were forced to resign or not.

With a further gush of relief, she found Shalieb beside her at dinner. She had thought there was no one in the world who could have helped her through that repast, but there was. Thirstily she drank in the childish enthusiastic welcome of his round sun-burnt face.

“ Well—and how is the young lady,” he began in his gentle chirping way, and then as though his keen little eyes saw something in the fatigue of her face that gave him his cue, he went on without waiting for an answer—“ she is magnificent—if she could but make—what do you say—connection. ‘ Zum beispiel ’—There is the fakir in the grove by the roadside—and there is her Bernard Shaw—in his temple in England—and they are both alike—‘ ganz egal.’ The fakir he stretches his arms to Heaven and they wither away. And Bernard Shaw says somewhere—‘ If we stop saving ourselves for one minute we are damned for ever.’ Is it not so? Or some-

thing like that? There was, too, a fakir who was very holy and never took his eyes from the ground to look upon a human face, for thirty years. He was very near Nirvana—and one day he lifted his eyes for one little minute and it was all undone, all that work of thirty years. Am I not right? Does not Shaw belong to the monkey school? God is the monkey and we are the little monkeys and we hold on tight, and God pays no attention at all—and if we let go we fall. Certainly he denies God, the term, but what difference does that make? None. God is a man-made term he says. But the thing is there—the thing to—how do you say, hang on to. Shaw is an absolutist. It is my pet joke. These socialists, they are such absolutists.”

She listened peacefully while he babbled on, looking at her now and then with a peculiarly piercing kindness, and gradually she came to feel that he knew and that he wasn't even worried by the knowledge. He was a genius and a fanatic, and he had no morals, and all that wonderful sense of his had been gleaned out of the wilderness and out of the ruins of other worlds. He was as old as the universe and as young as

a new born babe, and a man's passing anger was no more to him than the wind in the branches of one of his gigantic mountain pines. She found herself lifted on to a hill-top beside him, and he pointed out to her with his short fat finger, two little specks away down the valley, and those specks were her husband and herself. She laughed a little dizzily, but with all that feeling of leaden heart and bloodless brain—gone. And after she had talked quite calmly to the Lieutenant Governor about the redecorations at Simla House, and had challenged the icy eyes of Lady Howard over her after dinner coffee cup, and had sung for the company half a dozen Irish ballads, she found herself almost happily getting into her carriage with her husband and Shalieb who had asked to be taken along.

She could tell by the gleam in the wonderful little German's eye, and by the way he pulled his ragged moustache, that he had some long tale to tell, so she led the way to the dining-room and suggested some hot punch, and said she would leave them to spend the night together there.

Shalieb looked at Digby and Dibgy looked at

Shalieb. For a moment they questioned one another, and she divined with a thrill that there was something really afoot. She saw, too, with another thrill that her husband was alive again. All that marred, blurred look was gone from his face, and the hangdog slackness of his shoulders. He had forgotten for the time being, was a concentrated brain once more, planning ahead. She heard Shalieb murmuring "Nein, nein, mein liebes kind—du bleibst mit," and she watched her husband wheel up an arm-chair for her in that big abrupt absent-minded way of his, and she was glad.

Shalieb then, she realized as she sank back into her chair, had come to the rescue.

She could not follow him altogether. Many of the names he used were strange to her, and his method of imparting information was romantic and devious and oriental. He had been hunting a year ago, it seemed, for buried Chinese cities on the borders of Mongolia; he fixed the spot with Digby in connection with a shoot in the Pamirs, the Tagdumbash Pamir, the home of the *Ovis Polii*. He had been trekking up that same road which is the road into the Russian province of Durga, and there he had come

across a strange fellow " ein ganz wunderbarer mensch."

Shalieb stood before the fire, his short arms behind him, fat fingers waving backward towards the blaze, and looked down at them brightly through his spectacles.

" Ein ganz wunderbarer mensch," he repeated, nodding his head. And through his scrappy meandering discourse, interlarded with German phrases and Punjab phrases, and Pushtu phrases, she got a picture of the extraordinary stranger, a Burriat Lama down from Ladakh. His face was smooth and round and slit-eyed, his head shaved and smooth like a bullet. His single voluminous garment was of orange-coloured serge, and within the folds of this garment that was held up by a yak's hair girdle, he carried a little silver-lined drinking cup; and the leather bag, of dried goat-skin, in which he carried his osier, was heavy with the gold sovereigns that are of value from one end of the earth to the other. He spoke, this Buddhist Lama, many languages, Russian and Turkish and Persian. He was blood brother to the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush, and for all Shalieb could tell, the Chinese which he talked to the Chinese tea-merchants

who came across from the Upper Yangste was as good as their own.

“Nun,” said Shalieb, as though he at last were coming to the point, “dieser wunderbarer mensch-war—was friend to the ambitious Governor of the Province of Durga that is on the border of the Pamirs, and my friends, my dear friends, I saw him last week.” He paused and spread out his hands. Digby was sitting forward rigidly intent, thinking. He did not move. “He was on the Pindi-Kashmir road,” went on Shalieb’s falsetto voice. “And he went afterwards to Beshawalpur. He was dressed as a Pathan. He wore a cap and heavy silver jewels but I knew—I knew.” He rubbed his little hands together and smiled, and the mad vision in his eyes grew more mad!

Digby grunted. “Wait a minute. When was that?”

“Last week.”

“Did you talk with him?”

“Gewiss—gewiss. My tonga drove straight into his horse. Most unfortunate. I had to apologize. I apologized in Turkish.”

“Hum. What then?”

“He knew me, of course, and answered in

Pushtu that he didn't understand my tongue. But his voice was unmistakable. It is an oily voice my friends, and small like a child's."

"Did he have any servants?"

"Not a single one. He was travelling alone, but his horse was from the Maharajah's stables."

"And saddle-bags?"

"Yes, saddle-bags. Heavy."

Digby ruminated, his eyes on the floor, but Shalieb was full of enthusiasm.

"I see it all, my friends. I see it all. There is this very ambitious Russian Governor in the Province of Durga that is on the border of the Pamirs, and there is this Maharajah of Islamistan, and there is this Badri Nath in Hazratpur district, and there is this Buddhist devil lama, with his goat-skin bag of gold coins, and he travels—all the time he travels, up and down, and he knows all languages and all men and all devils, and—what do you say—he makes the connection."

There was a silence. Shalieb continued smiling ecstatically, and again with his hands at his back, waved them to the fire.

Digby looked up.

“This Badri Nath affair—is *what* then, to the Maharajah and his intrigue with our Russian Governor ? ”

“It is what you call, the test case ? Will it work, this plan for bringing Hindus and Mohammedans together ? That is the problem of the Punjab. The Maharajah says “yes.” This he must prove ; this is the test case—and too—it is his bona-fide with the Russian Government.”

Digby grunted again. And the incorrigible Shalieb chuckled.

“Is it not a beautiful tale, my friends, a tale to make a German Haussman, or a member of your English parliament snort in disbelief. They could not believe that all the wilderness and all of Russia, and all of Islamistan and of Beshawalpur, and of the British Punjab could be linked together by one little envoy, one dirty, dirty man with a goat-skin bag full of gold. But it is so, I know, because I am a Hindu and a Mohammedan, and a Hill-man, and I hold them all in my little brain.”

Suddenly Susan saw it ; all of Russia and all of Islamistan, and all of Beshawalpur and all of the Hindu and Mohammedan peoples of the north bearing down upon a little spot on the

map, the canal district of Bobbie Concannon. She stared horrified at the sight.

“But there is just one flaw,” Shalieb was saying, when she came back to their voices again. “Badri Nath. He is too local. He is not a big enough man. He does not see. If I were he, I could do it, but he cannot. You see—that is the weak spot. That is the place to put your finger.”

CHAPTER III

It was with jealousy that she realized the next morning, and increasingly during the following days in camp, how much of her task had been lifted from her by Shalieb. Overcome by fatigue, she had left the two men that night with documents and maps spread out on the dining-room table, and had gone to bed with a picture in her mind of her husband's scowlingly intent face. He had not looked up when she left the room, had not heard her murmured good-night, and she had scarcely seen him since.

As a rule, she enjoyed the isolation of camp life, but during the week which led them by daily stages toward Hazratpur district, she suffered. Her husband's absorption in mysterious business, which, contrary to his habit, he did not discuss with her over their tent dinner, made her own idleness oppressive. It became increasingly clear to her that the door was shut between his mind and her own; and gradually it was borne in on her, that aside from her par-

icipation in his career, she had no real interest in India. For the first time in her life, since the death of her baby, she felt really homesick. This was worse ; for then, in those white still days of weakness, he had been very near and very strong, while now he was withdrawn from her and the space that divided them was hot and blurred, as the shifting landscape about their ever-changing camp, was hot and blurred with dust.

She began to worry, and to worry was the one thing she had absolutely refused to do for ten years. Her will, however, because of her continual headaches and the horrible nervous feeling in her back, and the pain in the tendons behind her knees, and perhaps, too, because of that long strain that had been put upon it, failed her at last. In the mornings while her husband received deputations of villagers, judged cases, and inspected crops, she wandered among the villages, talking to the women and playing with their babies, but always while she sat with them in front of their mud huts, with their mild eyes fixed upon her, and that eternal lassitude of their lives covering her as with a stifling blanket, she was thinking, thinking erratically and fiercely

of other things, and places and people ; of the sun-setting behind the Houses of Parliament, of Hyde Park corner on a misty evening, of her Irish sea-coast with its sand bluffs and its green seas, and its wet winds. With a fat oily baby clinging to her skirts, and a little yellow alley straggling before her eyes between mud walls, with the smell of strong spices and dust and heat in her nostrils, and the sound of gentle Punjabi words in her ears, she dreamed incongruous dreams.

In the afternoon she tried to read ; she hated sewing. With her chair stretched out under a tree, and a book in her hands, she went on with her torturing dreams ; and when she could dream no longer, dropped into a more fearful present. It occurred to her that her husband had explained nothing. She had assumed Trotter to be the only cause of the catastrophe, this might be self-deluding. Trotter after all was too insignificant, he had not enough influence at home to matter much. And in any case, why had George not told her ? She had not wanted him to tell her then, had only wanted to bring him back to sanity ; but now that it was all over—why ? If he persisted in telling her nothing, she must

persist in thinking. The image of his face, blurred and de-humanized, appeared before her again and again. She had been so intent then, on helping him, that she had scarcely seen it, but now, with nothing to do for him, she saw, and the sight was ugly.

The fact, too, that Imogen did not write, gathered importance, after four days, and when a note arrived from Mrs Trueman, mentioning that she had not yet been able to get away to help Dr Choula, Susan succumbed to fear.

They were within ten miles of Bobbie's bungalow, the morning this letter arrived, so she sent for her horse at once, and with Samuel, who in her husband's absence always acted as her body servant, she rode over there.

The canal bungalow stood by itself in the middle of a wide field. It was a new bungalow of red unplastered brick, and no vestige of a garden protected its nakedness from the skies and the sun, and the reflecting glare of leagues of brown earth. Half a mile beyond, one could see a line of trees marking the bank of the canal, and at one point a great pile of stone and sand that looked like excavations or something in the way of building ; but there were no coolies to be

seen. The work was apparently abandoned and the district deserted. She passed a little cluster of mud houses. They were empty, not a sign of life anywhere; one roof had fallen in.

Something about that sunken roof was unspeakably depressing, and the loneliness which had been gradually taking possession of her, during the last few days, rose before her now as a spectre that had its abode in this place, a ghost that lived in the glaring sun, haunting the hot and blistering fields of a bare, deserted land.

A breedy chestnut arab was saddled and waiting, behind the bungalow, with an attendant *sais* more than half asleep. Smoke curled from the roof of the kitchen and, as she approached, a servant sped across the intervening space with a covered dish in his hands. The thought of Bobbie actually about to have a meal in that house seemed somehow uncanny and terrible.

He saw her through the window as she rode up to the verandah and rushed out to meet her, such intense delight upon his face, that she could have wept.

“I say, this is good of you.” He ran down the steps to her pony’s head, a fox terrier, a half-

bred Rampore hound and a Cocker spaniel careering about his heels. "I say—you know—this is awfully decent of you," he fumbled nervously with a wisp of mane that had strayed to the wrong side of the pony's neck. "Awfully decent of you," he repeated again, not looking at her.

She jumped down. "You're standing in the sun, Bobbie. Come in, I want some breakfast." She was quite steady now. There was something desperate going on here, something for her to do.

His dwelling was devoid of all but absolutely necessary furniture. The dining-room held a table and four bentwood chairs, and a set of shelves on which was an array of pickles and chutney, and condensed milk and biscuits and jam. Straw shades flapped against curtainless windows. The three dogs took possession of the one small rug which relieved the expanse of dusty cement floor, their noses together.

"Midgy's off to the hills next week," said Bobbie, dragging up one of the extra chairs, "she's had a touch of mange."

A very greasy servant hung in the doorway, with apparently not an idea in his turbaned

head of any duty for him connected with the arrival of the lady.

“Quick, plate, knife and fork for the mem-sahib,” rapped out Concannon crossly in the vernacular, and then as the man still hung there, stupidly, he muttered through tight teeth, “Son of a pig” and looked quickly at Mrs Digby and flushed crimson.

She turned away and swept up the spaniel from the rug, and held it against her throat and cheek.

“Poor Midgy, poor little Midgy. Let me have her, Bobbie. I’ll take her to Dalhousie for the hot weather.”

“Would you? That would be good of you—you know—would save me ‘fifty rats.’” The boy laughed, caught his breath a little, laughed a little more. They sat down.

“What’ll you drink, Mrs Digby? Lime juice and soda of course, and then you won’t get plague—you’ve heard that theory, I s’pose.”

“No—whose?”

“Miss Daunt’s. She got it from some lunny and wants to reorganize the Plague Commission. It’s like this, plain as the floor. There’s just one disease going, scurvy. Plague, you know

isn't plague at all, it's acute scurvy. Killing rats isn't going to do any good. These poor fools who sweat and slave and take a census of rats and fleas, are idiots and worse. No good in Plague Commissions and rat-killers. All we need is lime-juice and potatoes."

"What?"

"Yes, lime juice and potatoes. How simple, and think of those dreary devils in Bombay, they took a record of the fleas on 250,000 rats—took a year and wrote down all the variations in numbers of fleas in a rat's stomach and the number of plague germs in a flea's stomach—according to the season of the year. All that's pure bunkum. What we need is potash. What we suffer from is too much salt—sodium chloride——"

"Bobbie, dear, what are you talking about?"

"I'm quoting Miss Daunt. She came in here and told us all. She's going to take this luny's suggestion to Government, to the Viceroy herself—himself, I mean—herself to himself. They want to erect "Health pillars," they call 'em, disseminate information, in times of epidemic put willy nilly ten grains of chlorate of potash per

gallon into the water—distribute it like quinine ; and potatoes, tons and tons of potatoes.”

“ Oh well—she’ll have a new theory next year.”

“ Yes—but now it’s this, and she says she’s going to get at the Government of India—and by Jove, you know—she just might.”

Bobbie paused. His fork and spoon had been worrying the curry on his plate, but he had eaten nothing. He dropped them and turned his face to Mrs Digby, and she looked at it intently.

It was drawn and white. The skin seemed painfully tight across the nose and cheek bones. At the sides of his forehead and by the corners of his eyes, little blue veins stood out clearly.

She kept her eyes on his.

“ Bobbie,” she said at last. “ Bobbie, what’s the matter ? ”

He pushed back his chair.

“ I say, come into the other room and have a cigarette there, it’s — nicer — not much—but still——”

They found two long chairs in the next room, and a table with pipes and cigarettes on it, and in one corner a piano heaped with music.

"The piano and Midgy use up what's left of my pay, after feeding myself and the ponies," he laughed again in that jerky way.

Susan lit a cigarette and said nothing. Something in his face as he stood by the plaster mantelpiece that was blackened with smoke, kept her from repeating her question. She waited.

Through the curtainless window she could see a brown field and a hardened path stretching across it, to the horizon. Over the whole, washing it into one flat colourless tone, was sunlight, that glanced up from the ground into the room, hurtingly. She half closed her eyes against the glare.

"Where's Mr Annandale ? " she asked at last. It seemed to her that she and Bobbie had been forsaken. She felt terribly close to his suffering. There was nothing for either of them to hide behind in this aching emptiness.

"On an architectural expedition. He left last week, the day before they came ? "

"Who ? "

"Miss Daunt and Mr Trotter."

She had a sudden feeling of sickness.

"Did they drop in to see you ? "

“Di—didn’t you know? They stayed—it was convenient for them.”

“How long?”

“Oh, a couple of days—” He flushed suddenly, opened his lips, shut them, rapped his pipe against the mantel then in quite another tone, with a terribly obvious effort. “Jove, but she’s good looking—a perfect ripper and clever! She made me show her everything; all the works and explain just how the accident happened. Someone left the sluice open you know, and ruined the crops, that’s the trouble here, that and the plague. She was awfully keen. She got it all straight, wonderful!”

Sue rose to her feet.

“But Bobbie,” she said intensely, “Bobbie!” He met her eyes desperately and she stopped. They stood thus facing one another.

It was pitiful his trying to hide, when there was no place to hide in, it was sweet and young of him to make believe even now, but for her own sake she wanted him to break down. It came to her suddenly that she could bear her own pain, if she could only balance her growing insanity with the sense of his trouble. If he would only accuse Moggie. If he would only let

go—throw himself on her sympathy ; good God, give her something to do.

“ She’s wonderful, you know,” he brought out again at last, and in the sound of his compressed voice there was only one unmistakable thing, a suspense that waited to be satisfied ; and his eyes still dwelt on her, desperately. She had to give him what he wanted.

“ Ah yes, quite wonderful,” she said lightly turning toward the door.

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He told her, as she mounted her pony, that Imogen was in tents not five miles away, just outside of Kashi Ram’s plague camp. She was living there with some Indian girls, medical students, and working with Choula. The announcement seemed quite definitely to insist on its special meaning, and although it was the middle of the day, and the sun very hot, she turned in the direction he pointed out.

Her weariness and the heat made it impossible to think as she rode. She did not know why she was being impelled, by such delirious pain, to seek out Moggie. One, two, three, four—One, two—she found herself counting as she rose to her horse’s trot. Dust swept about her in

clouds, thick, golden blinding dust. She could scarcely see for the pain behind her eyes. Her horse stumbled. With all her ebbing strength she held him up. Yes—there were tents there, beyond that line of trees—Moggie would in any case, give her a drink of water.

CHAPTER IV

HER feeling when she came on them, was fear, fear lest she find a look of hate on her husband's face. And for the moment that she stood petrified, she waited for that look to come, knowing that if it did, she would die there, on that sun-baked spot, before the other woman's tent. But it did not come, and the feeling that succeeded her fear was for the moment a trivial thing, a sense of unfairness, that had to do with her own bedraggled grimy weariness and Imogen's immaculate beauty.

She thought rapidly. The odds were all against her. Imogen had everything on her side, youth and beauty and novelty. More, Imogen had never made the man feel dependent and weak. Still more, Imogen stood for the young generation, the new spirit; her power over his imagination lay in the fact that she not only offered a means of escape from shame, but the promise of a quite new self-realization. How was she, his wife, who had held before him the

mirror of his own nature, who had never once pandered to his vanity nor offered him an escape from himself, how was she to win ?

She found herself confronted with the temptation to play a part, and recoiled from it. There *was* no game to play. There *were* no odds. The thing *was not* complicated. It was perfectly simple. There was only one reality, let it stand.

She stepped forward under the tent flap.

Never, even afterwards, did she analyze that first instant impression of hers. She had not suspected, either before or then, she had known, in a flash, known the whole of the truth, not a half truth that would have sickened her, but the whole truth that suddenly made all things lucid, and saved to all things, dignity. She thanked God that neither of the two made it more difficult for her to hold to that.

"I would like a drink of water," she said, going into the tent, and as she had looked first into her husband's face for hatred, she now looked into Imogen's face for shame, and there was no shame there.

The man had turned from them both after that first moment. He sat with his arms

hanging between his knees and his head bowed ; he seemed to have left them to themselves.

Imogen brought the water and stood waiting, and as Susan drank, the values of the situation changed again. It seemed to her that she had these two in her power ; that they were big helpless children who did not understand and did not know, and that she was their mother and had known them both since they were born. It seemed to her that she knew all men and all things, and that she was as old as the world and that she only cared to let them live and make them happy.

As long as the silence lasted she continued to see things brilliantly, and to sail an impersonal intelligence above the three poor little human beings who sat there under that hood of canvas in the middle of the plains of the Punjab ; but when Imogen spoke, she dropped ; dropped again into the mind of a wretched woman, unspeakably lonely and weary unto death.

“ I would like to tell you all about it,” said Imogen. She spoke quite without effort, and the splendour of her calmness was terrifying.

“ Perhaps it would be best to begin with some

facts, some concrete details, before we discuss the underlying reality.”

Susan nodded. She almost smiled. It was so exactly what one would expect of Moggie. So wonderfully honest and so wonderfully obtuse.

“I have not seen George since I left your house, until to-day. I left then because he made me angry and because he wanted to interfere with my plans—for no other reason—not because I was afraid. To-day he came here to find Dr Choula and he found him with me, having lunch at my table, and his own feeling for me, combined with his deep-rooted sentimental horror of the mingling of the white race and the black, made him suspicious, more than suspicious. He accused me of indecent, that was his word, indecent conduct. He was insufferable. I grew angry. I told him, what is true, that I like Choula better than any man I know, that we are mental affinities and that if he would have me, I would work with him for the rest of my life. He said it was beastly. I said he was evil-minded. We stood glaring at each other, and then, suddenly, what we both knew was underneath it all—welled up—like a

flood. Suddenly—it all went out. I forgot everything. He kissed me. He had kissed me once before, but this time it was different. That's all." She stopped. There was a silence.

She was very beautiful, and there was a young, desperately earnest expression on her face. She actually was seeing nothing but the splendour of the central fact. No doubts, no shame, no sympathy, nothing but honest and superb selfishness.

The man had been sitting quite still with his back half-turned to them.

"And you—George?" said Sue, at last.

He rose unsteadily and faced them, his face whiter than she had ever seen it before, and its whiteness somehow hurt her terribly with an awful relief and sympathy.

"I"—he muttered through his teeth. "How do I know? I'm only a man. You know—you both know. I'm as plain as Hell—" He brought his eyes to his wife's face. "I'll go outside and wait." He paused a moment. "I'll go outside—you can call me. I only want to leave you without me—but I'm there." He went out.

Together they watched him disappear behind the row of trees.

“That was not quite all, Moggie.”

Imogen hesitated, and somehow her hesitation seemed less hopeless than her sureness. It made her human and tangible. If she could feel no fear and no pain and no bewilderment, how could they understand each other? She must feel.

“No—it’s not all. It’s all that there has been—but now—” Imogen wound her hands together in front of her painfully, then flung them apart and dropped them against her side. “I want him now.”

“So do I.”

“Yes—I know, and you’ve everything on your side—your wedding ring—convention—habit—sentiment—brilliancy—wit—the bondage of memory—but they are all nothing to me—they don’t matter.”

“No, they don’t matter.”

They were seated now facing each other, and she saw for the first time, bewilderment on the girl’s face.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean just that. I won’t use any of those things to get him.”

There was a pause. Imogen threw back her head.

“Do you want me to give him back?”

“No, you can’t. What you’ve got of him, you can’t give back. What you haven’t got is mine—I couldn’t give it to you—it’s mine.”

“Are we to divide him then?”

“No, it would ruin him.”

“That’s what I want—to ruin him and make him begin again at the bottom.”

“Yes, I know. You want to exert power. You don’t love him, but you want to work out another idea on him. Yes, it’s true, Moggie—listen, you must see. If you’re ever to understand any little sweet thing in the world, the bleating of a lamb, or the cry of the wind in the trees, or the smile of an old, old man, you must see *now*.”

“But what do you want?”

“I want you to stop wanting him.”

“But how can I?”

“Only by feeling my need and his, more nearly than anything else; so that you want me to have him more than you want him yourself.”

“But I can’t.”

“Try, Moggie, dear, try. Look at me and think and remember. He is to me, my whole life. I have made it with him; and if you

break him down you are breaking down what I have toiled to build. You call me wise and understanding and wonderful—and you don't see that all the things you admire me for have been poured drop by drop into my husband's life. You want to waste the only things in the world that you love, I mean the things you love in me—you don't make connections—you don't understand.

Again—it's like this. You think with one sweep of your arm to dash his life to pieces and with another to put it together—but character and conduct and the integrity of a soul are not built up and kept in repair like that. For three hundred and sixty five days, ten times over, I have worked with him. How? What have I done? What does it mean? It means that ten thousand times I have held my tongue—that every morning, for ten years, I have prayed to know the way. It means that I have borne a child and buried it, and have gone on burying the loss of it a hundred times a day under a smile. It means that I have sat for hours in sickening Indian homes, and have given my energies to a social round which is unutterably dragging. It means that I have gone through

months of heat, every hour of which was a blazing furnace—and that I have grown old and ill—it means all this and much, much more that you (in your virginity) could not understand—and I have been glad—and now——”

She stopped. All through she had managed to preserve a very quiet, matter-of-fact tone, but her voice was beginning to grate against her throat. The danger of seeming sentimental kept her still now. She did not look at Moggie. After all, it was a forlorn attempt. One could not translate one's experience—and the situation now rested in the man's hands. Her talk could not alter facts. Why, in the midst of her misery, had she been compelled to care whether Imogen understood or not? It was absurd and off the point. It was irrational. Imogen was taking her husband from her and should be hated in consequence. Some day, when she was alone, she would wish that she had killed her. That was the only thing to do with a blind force—choke it to death. But she was too little and the force too big.

She rose to her feet, the tent swaying round her and as she started away carefully without turning, for she must get to her pony and mount

it and get home, she heard the girl's voice behind her.

“ I think I begin to see—” it said.

How foolish ! Of course not. There was nothing to see but the sun and the spots it made before one's eyes. She must get home and tie a wet towel around her head, very, very tight. George would tie it for her—oh no—George might not be there.

CHAPTER V

It seemed to her that she began to hear before daybreak the pattering of feet. She knew that long before sunrise they would begin to pour into Auranga, the children of India, on holiday, gathering from all the towns and villages for miles around, to attend the great Mela of the two rivers; and it was as though the ground under her tent gave back the sound to her from a thousand places, that little soft thudding sound of bare feet, treading the earth swiftly. And as she lay in bed, listening, the noise of the million feet that were moving towards her melted into a chant, a menacing murmur of inarticulate multitudes.

She started with her husband, after an early breakfast, to drive the ten miles in a carriage. They drove, as they had ridden home to camp the night before, in silence, but their silence which then had cried so loud along the deserted fields, was absorbed now in the ceaseless clamour of the crowd that moved with them. And for

that hour during which they drove she was grateful to the brilliant holiday folk, to the jolting *ekkas* crammed with women and children, to the pompous equestrians and less pompous giants astride diminutive donkeys, to the dense moving mass that swung along with its swift, trotting step. Drivers yelled at their lank beasts, babies wailed, women chattered, and the sound of the million feet pattering in the dust was drowned by the noise of wheels and horses hoofs, so she ceased listening to the menace in her heart and gave herself to the bright eyes and the sparkling jewels, and to the flood of crimson and gold, and emerald and orange, that moved as a river moves, dyed by a setting sun.

The gods were to be taken for a drive. In their Juggernaut car they were to be dragged by twenty men from the temple to the river where they would bathe on this holy day. Between the temple and the river there was a mile of hard unbuilded land, half as wide as it was long, and in this arena, that was overlooked on either side by high houses, the crowd gathered. Every housetop was a perch for a flock of women. The surface of the ground was covered from sight by the multitude.

Their carriage drew up by the road along which the car of the gods was to come. It had left no wake as it passed through the sea of people, and when it came to a standstill, the waves of that sea rolled up against its sides, cutting them off.

Susan Digby looked down into the crowd as from the deck of a ship. A very beautiful girl baby, adorned with a single silver chain, smiled from her father's shoulder. Susan smiled back from under her green parasol, and sank into a reverie, succumbing to the great purposelessness of the multitude. Under the sure, unfailing sun that poured down upon it, that warmed it and healed it and made it beautiful, the crowd lived without curiosity and without sense of time. It was an end in itself. The pilgrimage of the gods was an excuse for its being. The crowd loved itself; the crowd was India. Pedlars moved about with trays of food; jugglers juggled; fakirs spread their rugs and meditated, while coppers chinked into their begging bowls; women squatted in groups chattering, nursing their babies; men gravitated about long water-pipes; numberless little groups made quiet eddies in the midst of the sea. All the

activities of life went on happily within the bosom of the million-souled monster.

She did not know how long she had been there, half-doing in the midst of that multitude, when she was roused by the far clamour of the approaching Juggernaut; but with the first rumble of that gathering roar, all the menacing chant of the early morning seemed to burst upon her. The crowd, too, was changed. It surged forward, it struggled, it began to murmur and to cry out as the shouting came nearer. A definite rhythm of groaning and struggling sounded through the volume of voices in terrible regular cadences. The sight of sweating, bleeding men, bending before the grotesque and obscenely decorated car, made her sick, she turned away and as she did so, sweeping the panorama with her gaze, she saw them all in the crowd, Imogen in white with a scarlet parasol, Trotter's bushy head just appearing beside her, beside him again the purple hooded face of Mrs Badri Nath, and farther along, separated from this group by a thousand people, Choula, head and shoulders above the multitude, and at last, behind him, Bobbie Concannon's face, set and white, like a mask. She reached for her husband, to point

them out. He was behind her, and she turned full round, swinging her parasol around with her, and at that instant, the shot was fired.

She found herself in the middle of a clear space on the ground. Samuel lay before her on his back. She bent over him. A very small spot of blood, like the disc of red on Mrs Badri Nath's forehead, showed on his white shirt. How very small it was. She looked around. A white sky quivered behind the housetops where the scarlet figures of women could be seen straining forward. Mounted police had driven back the multitude that surged behind them roaring, as waves surge against a wall. All of India hung there, threatening to engulf her—and on her other side, selected miraculously out of the Oriental crowd, were a dozen white men. The white men were motionless, and silent.

She knelt in the middle of the clear space. Samuel tried to speak. She bent her head. "Pray, memsahib, pray." She prayed.

Her husband's voice roused her.

"I must send you back. I cannot go with you. I will send two of my men. Can you go alone with them, or will you wait in the rest house here?"

She struggled to her feet leaning on his arm a moment. They were carrying Samuel away. Tears, blinding and hurting, seemed to rush up like fire from the depths of her. To throw herself into his arms and swoon there—that was all she could do—she swayed a little, and then Bobbie's face swam before her. "I will wait," she managed somehow to say.

He led her to the carriage and put her in, and shut the door. The hood had been raised. She saw his face a moment through the window and strangled the cry in her throat. The carriage tore through the crowd.

They, the servants, made a bed for her with some rugs in an inner room of the rest house, and she lay down there. The room was empty, and cool like a tomb. Through the walls, the clamour of an awful world sounded like waves breaking on a distant shore. They brought her tea and she drank it, and began to think.

Her husband's life had been attempted and Samuel had been shot instead. Samuel's wife was a widow now, but so was she. It might have been that swing of her parasol that had upset the man's aim. She would believe so. It had been given her to save his life. How

simple it would have been, if he had died, or she. Ah that was it. She should have been the one. Samuel had three children. His baby was only a month old. That was a beautiful baby who had smiled at her in the crowd. A baby's smile—she felt like weeping a little over that baby's smile.

She remembered having said things to Imogen—and Imogen had brought Samuel's child into the world. She had seen Imogen's face once over the round bundle of a baby that rested in her arms. Imogen was wonderful. If they were all Indians, George would bring her to live with them. They would all live together and Imogen would have children and she, Susan, would take care of them—why not?

It occurred to her that Imogen had not been among that little group of white men whom she had noticed standing apart. That shot had divided the two races like a knife. Bobbie had been there. Trotter too. Bobbie had stepped forward towards her. Where was he? She had lost him afterwards.

The gods were probably having their bath now.

A servant coughed outside the door, and came

in at her bidding to say that there was soup and chicken and lamb cutlets and custard pudding for dinner. She hadn't the courage to forbid his preparing the meal. He disappeared again.

In the old days, a missionary, when he had finished a term of service, had eaten ten thousand chickens. There were two lizards on that wall and one on this.

She began to shiver. If only there were more rugs to put over her. There was nothing more. In any case nothing would make her warm. This was just the chill that preceded fever. She drew up her knees and ground her teeth together to keep them from chattering. Her feet were like ice. Long shudders shook her body. She tried to brace herself against the shaking.

A servant came in with a lamp and hot water after a long time, and after a long time she got up from her bed. The lizards still hung motionless on the wall. She washed her face and hands with difficulty. Her head was very hot but she was cold, dreadfully cold.

Another cough outside the door—that chicken and that custard pudding; she would have to face the *Khansama's* disappointment after all.

But it was Gopi Chand outside the straw

curtain. She went out to him. He stood, very round and very solid, against the moonlight that was like a sheet of silver beyond the verandah.

“What is it, Gopi Chand?”

“I am now without a master, and I have come.”

She had a momentary terror.

“Ah—Trotter—Sahib.” She brought out, forcing herself to think through an aching brain.

“What do you mean? Where is he?”

“The train for the south has departed—and the great English ship will depart in two days.”

She gasped. After everything, and with all her weakness and her rising temperature, she was so surprised and then so relieved and then so amused, that she laughed.

“He has run away?”

“The train runs fast, Memsahibji.”

“And the Miss Sahib?”

He shook his head.

“You don’t know where she is?”

Again he shook his head.

“Where have you come from?” She stepped to the edge of the verandah so that to face her, he must turn his countenance to the light. But she could read nothing there. It was round

and smooth as always, and the little eyes were bright with their own beaming kindness.

“ I have come from the station, Memsahibji, and I have seen no one, but I know that they have gone.”

“ Who—the Badri Nath ? ”

He nodded. “ Their camp is empty, but it stands. They have gone suddenly. The memsahib is wise. The Sahib is wiser.”

“ And where is the Sahib ? ”

Again he shook his head.

“ Who am I, to know aught of the Sahib’s doings. The Sahib is wise and his ways are wonderful, and the sound of his horse’s hoofs is as the sound of petals falling.”

“ Then why have you come ? ” she demanded wildly.

“ I have come to take you with me, Memsahibji to the Canal Sahib’s bungalow. The Canal Sahib’s bungalow is in a lonely place, but the night is like day and there is a tonga here.”

Bobbie had sent for her—and at this time of night—no, it was not late. It was only eight o’clock. But why had he not come himself ? What did this little man know ?

Gopi Chand had already stepped out into the

moonlight. She discerned a tonga in the shadow of a tree. Gopi had not asked her if she would go—he was shaking up the driver—there was evidently no time to waste.

As she put on her hat, she thought, "What if George comes while I'm away." She hesitated. Bobbie, alone in that house, needing her. She went out.

Gopi Chand had a fur rug on his arm. It was her husband's.

CHAPTER VI

MISTS, white as foam, covered the plain, and the canal bungalow, unsubstantial in the moonlight as a skeleton dwelling, adrift upon that sea of vapour, seemed to float midway between the invisible earth beneath and the far moon above it. There was no sound, not even the barking of dogs. The villages, she remembered, were deserted.

She had listened for some sound to pierce the phantom world, but there was none, and she looked for a light as she left the tonga and stepped into the verandah, but there was no light in any of the rooms. It was so cold, that the ice within her heart, seemed not so much to be fear, as just the frozen deposit of that relentless moon.

Gopi Chand had seemed surprised by the darkness. He had disappeared in the direction of the servants' houses, telling her to wait, but she could not wait. Her terror of the moon, or the rolling spectre of the mist, an indefinable instinct

whatever it was, drove her along the verandah. She lifted the curtain of the last doorway.

The room was flooded with moonlight, and Bobbie lay there dead.

Her feeling was one of great pity for his poor lonely spirit that was adrift now on that cold sea of mist, under the moon.

His hands were no colder than her own. There was no disfigurement upon his face, nor any sweetness. He was just frozen like herself. She laid her head against his arm.

She had been there a long, long time, her body with his, in that room, while she searched for him along that eternity of mist and cold outside, and when her husband entered the room, she saw him in the light of a lamp on the table, and realized that Gopi Chand must have put it there before.

"He is dead," she said without rising from her knees. "There has been a collision. The world and the moon have rushed together and he was the little innocent one, and he has been crushed." She knew that she sounded insane, that she was seeing things abnormally, and she did not want to talk foolishly, but she could not stop.

“ You see I have to tell you, because we have been together, wandering out there, alone, in the mist, and he has no voice now. We were both forsaken and we both died, only I am still here somehow. You have been cruel enough to call me back, but he is gone, gone for ever, alone. He has left even me, though I understand. So I must tell you about him—about us. You see, he loved someone. And he was forsaken, as I told you, and then he was betrayed by the person he loved, and then he found that all the building he had done for ten years, he built canals, you know, was undone, and that people despised the building he had done and blamed him for the floods that came and washed it away. I had been building, too, you know, there were floods, just the same as his, so I understood him. It was quite natural for us to die. We were dead already, we only had to shake off something, a body. He did, you see, and I would have, too, but you came. You had no right to come. I was looking for him out there and he was looking for me. I heard his voice. There was no other sound, not even the barking of dogs. The dogs even had gone from the deserted villages. There was nothing

alive under the moon except his voice, and now you have choked it and he will be alone for ever."

She stopped. Her husband stood still, he did not dare move. She looked at him side-wise and caught the picture of terror on his face. It was the way one looked at a person who was going insane. She must be the person he was looking at. Was she going insane?

She looked into an abyss. The world lay there in fragments, not neat little fragments, but messy blurred pieces, smeared with liquid. If she chose, she could dive down into it all, and go mad. She was on the top of a hill and she could do as she liked. One little movement of letting go would do it, would begin it. She would begin rolling down.

But there was something else, something clear and hard and precise that she had kept by her all her life. It was a tool that she had built with. She still had it. If she stuck it in the ground, anchored herself with it—

With a great and terrible effort that hurt more than anything had ever hurt her in her

life, she turned her face full to him, and then with the very last bit of her strength, she drove that tool thing into the ground.

She had only exerted her will, she told herself as he lifted her from the floor.

PART V
MOGGIE

CHAPTER I

A WILD animal suddenly caught in a cage might be angry and uncomfortable ; it would not feel ridiculous. Imogen felt ridiculous ; she was chagrined ; she saw herself.

She had been kidnapped and flung like a bundle of bedding into a grotesque Oriental vehicle used for transporting *purdah* women. Within a cramping and suffocating and horribly jolting pocket she lay tied up in a knot, and she beheld the hooded *ekka* which carried her, emblem of woman's slavery, tearing along the moonlit road, with an armed man seated in front beside the driver. Thousands of these same absurd vehicles, looking like swollen spiders, crammed with creatures who peeped through the curtains, had crawled that day to the great Mela, and now she herself pressed her face against an aperture in that loathesome hood. She could see a patch of brilliant sky and the moving tops of trees against the moonlight.

Anything she tried to do would be absurd. If

she tore aside the curtains and screamed, who would hear? What peasant of India would stop a wildly dashing *ekka* to rescue a woman from under a revolver; if she threw herself from the back of the vehicle she would be nowhere. If she addressed her guard through the hood he would pretend not to understand English. Perhaps he really did not understand. There was nothing to do.

Had it been less ignominious there might have been some fun in the adventure, but to calmly watch the arrest of Mr and Mrs Badri Nath and then to be marched off oneself—it was too sickening. If the Badri Naths had shown any pluck at all, she would have resisted, of course. It had been the sickly terror on their faces that had disarmed her.

She had never seen any expression of any kind on Badri Nath's face before, but its immobility had promised something worth while when the time came. She had waited, watching him; that was one reason why she had done nothing when the police came; and he had failed. He had whined and hung his head and looked sick. His wife had been only a shade more impressive in her sullen impassivity. And Trotter?

Where was Trotter? He had never turned up at all after the scene at the Mela. The Badri Nath had hurried her away through that yelling crowd, and she had lost everybody, after just one glimpse of Sue, poised like a white butterfly in the midst of that crawling mob of black beetles.

This was the day on which the strike was to have been declared. Everything, they had assured her, was ready. Rubbish! They must have been lying. Probably they never intended the strike at all. They had used Trotter and Trotter had used her, and she had used Bobbie. She had not liked that, pumping Bobbie. It was like bleeding a lamb. He had been so sporting, too, all through; had not cried out once, and he had suffered enough. Her being there with Trotter was just the sort of thing to outrage a young innocent like himself. His desperate effort not to see what he thought was there—poor darling—no sense of humour, nothing but good breeding to carry him through. He took everything so seriously, his work—that note from his chief, snubbing him. The morning it arrived he had gone white as a ghost. His chief had had a bad breakfast probably, and Bobbie had suffered. It was a beastly shame

that they had all used him. That was a horrid feeling she had had when she handed over to Trotter all the maps and data Bobbie had given her. It was not secret information to be sure, but if she had not known Trotter—she couldn't have. All means were justified by the end. She had always believed that. But what was the end. This? All gone up in smoke.

Digby had done it. No one else could have arrested the Badri Naths at the psychological moment with such damnable and precise success. Great Scott——

Imogen sat up straight in the dark of her rapidly travelling prison.

Then Digby must have done this kidnapping as well.

The situation grew less and less romantic, more and more absurd. If Digby was doing this, she might as well go to sleep. She burrowed down among some cushions, there were rugs and two pillows. She might have guessed.

The *ekka* came to a standstill. Someone spoke outside her hood in a strange tongue. Her body was terribly cramped. She pushed back the front curtain. The driver's seat was empty. Before her she saw a brick wall,

plastered with brown discs of cow-dung. The air was chill and damp with a queer smell. "Where are we?" she demanded in English. The head of a native in a grimy turban appeared around the corner of the *ekka*. He salaamed gravely and said something she did not understand. She repeated her question. He salaamed again staring at her with meaningless, uncomprehending eyes.

This was hopeless. She edged forward on to the front of the vehicle and saw that they were in a courtyard, surrounded by brick walls, before the door of a large native dwelling, a *haweli* such as she had seen in the native city. The house was plastered halfway up its very high, windowless front, and designs in red and blue were painted on the plaster. A flight of steps led up to the door which was wide and rather impressive in a battered way, and an old lady, obviously an Indian of distinction, stood there bowing, her hands outstretched and a white scarf floating from her withered face.

Imogen jumped to the unclean ground, and ascended the steps to meet the "grande-dame" feeling dirty and dishevelled and small. Very bright dark eyes looked out upon her from

a network of deep lines. Imogen put out both hands. The Indian woman took them, laughing gently, and began to talk. Imogen could not understand a word, and shook her head. The old lady laughed again, her little dry chuckle. She pulled Imogen within the house. From a corner of an inner courtyard where there were plants about a little fountain, they mounted a very steep winding stair. Up and up they went and at last entered directly from the stair, a room. Imogen gathered that this was her room. It was large, with two small windows set deep in the wall, and bare, with rough brick floor and plaster walls—strips of matting partly covered the dusty bricks.

Her hostess, or was it her gaoler, hovered about, smiling and chattering. Gesturing with her thin bony hands she led the way into a dressing-room where she pointed out a can of hot water, soap and towel, back to the bedroom, pointed to the bed, a narrow bed covered with a crimson quilt, and at length with many more gestures all accompanied by kindly smiles, disappeared.

Imogen stood looking out of the window. One could see pyramids of roof tops, a bit of ambling

bazaar, in the distance green fields and a grove of trees and the cone-like dome of a Hindu temple. It was early morning. Sunlight was beginning to touch the higher houses. The *ekka* must have travelled all night. She was very tired and all her bones ached and she had no idea where in the world she was. Never, even in Holloway Gaol had she been so cut off from the world. There was not a soul she could speak to.

Something like terror settled on her, as she stood staring out of the window, the terror of a child left alone in the dark. Everything was all right, she knew that, she was only tired; but those cage-houses, that temple dome, those bullocks away down there in the street, and the awful sound of strange tongues, muzzling her own speech. Tears in her eyes that smarted—that, that—had it not been absurd enough without the ignominy of crying?

The horror of an exile in an alien land—they had all talked about that and she had laughed at them.

Another old woman, like a mole, round and grey in her dingy *sari*, came in presently with a tray. There was tea and toast and two soft-boiled eggs. Imogen fell to hungrily, vaguely

wondering how these women, who knew no English, could arrange so well a Miss Sahib's breakfast. Someone must be working behind the scenes.

Having eaten everything there was to eat, she sat waiting, but no one came to take away the tray. The house was very still ; sunlight slanted into the deep-set windows. What did these Indian women do all day ? She sat a long time, longer than she had ever sat idle in her life. Her thoughts travelled round and round ceaselessly, in tune to the creaking of a well somewhere outside. She got up abruptly and walked to the window. The same roof tops and the same sky. She turned away and walking the length of the room, turned again. She began to pace the room.

It occurred to her, in the midst of her marching up and down, that this was what she was here for, to be alone, to think. She was being disciplined, and for a moment she was tempted to yell and beat her head against the wall, but her thoughts by this time had become sufficiently powerful in themselves to save her from any hysterical resentment. She settled again into mental gloom.

The line of sunlight that had been moving up the wall had left the window when there was a knock on her door. The little mole-like creature stood there. She held a visiting card in her brown claw. It was Kashi Ram's card.

He was standing at the far edge of the roof top when she stepped out of the door that the mole opened for her, and she went towards him slowly, without greeting. His face in the brilliant morning sunlight looked metallic set, and with the shine on it of bronze.

"This is my mother's house," he said.

She remained silent. So many things were happening in her mind that she could not select, or arrange, or even articulate to herself.

"I have come to beg you to remain here for a few days. It was Digby, of course, who arranged for your—your deportation—but he cannot force you to stay. I have, however, to appeal to your reason and your generosity. It will be of the greatest possible service to us all if you will consent to remain." He paused searching her face. She remained silent.

"The Badri Naths have been deported in reality on a verified charge of sedition." He stopped at the quick gesture of her hand—but

she had nothing after all, to say. "Mr Trotter is on his way to Bombay."

She winced and burst out at that—"How do you know?"

"Gopi Chand, who is a C.I.D. Officer, saw him off on the train."

"A what?"

"One of Digby's secret service men."

"Oh—the brute."

"Who?"

She shuddered. "I don't know." How hatefully brilliant the light was.

He made a movement as though to go, and she put out her hand suddenly. She could not help that gesture. How pitiable to be afraid to let him go! Of what was she afraid? Of herself—herself——

"You're going away?" she asked, in spite of her determination to keep silent.

"You will stay then?" he asked back.

"Yes."

He bowed in his stiff way. "I must go. I came by an early train, and must get back, but I will come in a day or two with news."

He really started; he was half way across the roof.

“ Back where ? ” she said after him.

He stopped staring down at his feet and turning his cap round and round in his hand.

“ What has happened ? ” she cried, as he stood, terribly silent. “ Where are they, Sue and Digby and Bobbie ? ”

“ Digby has taken his wife home.”

“ And Bobbie ? ” She awaited the ghastly pain that hovered chokingly over her.

“ Bobbie is dead.” And as the metallic hardness of his face melted horridly together, she felt something more than that pain of her own.

“ You loved him,” she whispered desperately.

CHAPTER II

ANOTHER day passed while she battled gloomily with the load that was settling down upon her. Kashi Ram had brought her things from the camp. There were some medical books among them, and she read sullenly while dreadful images of the work she had done in that plague-stricken village, and the more dreadful picture of Bobbie lying dead in that bungalow swam before her eyes. In the night she had dreamed of washing a plague corpse over and over with chloride of mercury. She could not shake off her dream.

The smells rising from the dung-smeared courtyard below her window sickened her, and seemed to her the noisome essence of India; nevertheless towards noon she went for a walk in the bazaar, the sleepy, deadly bazaar, followed discreetly by the little grey mole. The bazaar ended in a green field. The field ended in a grove. Beyond the grove there would be another field and then another formless, growthless village. Nothing had any point. There was no

life in it all, no purpose. The bazaar just ended in a ditch. Emaciated whitish dogs lay there covered with flies. She turned back. Children shrieked after her. A boy of ten or twelve addressed her in a travesty of English. Controlling a ferocious impulse to box his ears, she hurried back to the house.

Her hostess was downstairs, in one of the inner verandahs that enclosed the courtyard, chattering with some neighbours. She was seated cross-legged on a strip of matting, chewing betel-nut, and got up with a jingle of jewellery. The women made room for Imogen with many smiles and gestures, and went on chattering. One was nursing a boy of two at her great hanging breast.

Imogen felt rather sick. This was Choula's mother, this battered old woman with her bare feet and her silver anklets, and her crimson teeth. Dignity she had and a certain hoary picturesqueness, but she was as dry and hard and unknowable as the earthen field outside the village, that wrapt in itself the histories of a hundred alien peoples and turned a withered but expressionless face to the sky.

Her idleness and her business, her dignity

and her absurdity, her old age and her extreme childishness, the kindliness of her smile and the shrill rattle of her voice—all baffling and distressing—went to make an appalling background for Choula that Imogen resented.

The Indian woman, and her house, and her dusty decrepit village assumed grotesque proportions. Lest the image of Choula himself grow strange, she shut him out of her mind.

The boy who had been fed at his mother's breast, clambered down and ran away across the verandah. The sight was revolting. She hurried off up the narrow stairs.

Sue had once said in that lightly caustic way of hers, when Imogen was holding forth about the value of a broken down and reconstructed experience, that it would take a battering ram and an army behind it to make a breach worth mending in Moggie's fortress. The battering ram was at work now.

An army of facts as relentless as bullets, rained upon that all but impregnable wall of her theory, and yet in themselves they would never have shaken it. The Badri Naths had been deported; Trotter had run away, Bobbie was dead, Sue's heart was broken; these were some

of the facts ; but what made the terrible heaviness of that load on her chest was not the combined weight of these, but something else, the ghastly realization that not one of them was a surprise. She had foreseen them all, or at least she could have foreseen them ; and that was just as blameable. Her stupidity, if it had been stupidity, had been deliberate. It occurred to her now that this stupidity was just the same thing as the sin they talked about.

If it had not been for her theory she might have seen. No, let her be honest, good God, now at least, honest where she had been merely stupid. She had seen—her instinct, her heart, something had kept telling her ; and her mind that was synonymous with her theory, had refused to listen. It couldn't afford to listen, it would have broken down, it was breaking down now.

The consciousness of sin, she loathed the expression, but gave in to it at last because there was no other and she had to have one ; the consciousness of sin, then, was breaking her down and it hurt terribly, so terribly that she wondered how she had ever had the impertinence to introduce anyone to such a process.

She could remember lots of times where that little thing had worked. That morning in the garden when she let Trotter tie her up to the Badri Nath's; one day, at the very beginning, when she was in Digby's study, and Sue had come to the door and she had shut her eyes to the look in Sue's face; a night on the verandah when she kissed Bobbie and told him she would come to see him and his canal; oh, lots and lots of times with Bobbie, while Trotter stood there like the devil in the background, waiting. And that day of the Mela when she went off with the Badri Nath's. She could have rushed through the crowd to Sue. For one moment she had hesitated. Her instinct, strong within her, had told her to throw it all over then and there, fling it off, all that mass of crawling subterfuge and unreality and rush into that empty space where Sue was, kneeling in the midst of the crowd, and save her—but she had not gone. Save her from what? There had been something to save her from—what could it have been?

That was the worst thing of all; she had not gone to Sue. That in itself, if there had been nothing else, would have proved to her that she had sinned.

All the afternoon and most of the night, she went on thinking.

From her roof top that second morning, she was looking down into the courtyard at the mole who, with her grey cotton garment clinging to her brown nakedness, was bathing in the fountain, when a carriage drove up to the house. From the other side of the roof she could look down on the front door. A closed carriage stood there. She had a fluttering feeling inside her ; her hands gripped her skirt nervously on either side.

Mrs Trueman got out of the carriage, and a little cowering figure in a black *sari*, slipped out after her and slunk into the house. It was too ironical ; she and Fulmani in the same refuge.

The sunlight on the flat roof was blinding. A bird wheeled in a pale, depthless sky. A pair of white bullocks moved across a brown field. That cowering figure of shame——

“ And you here ? ” said Mrs Trueman’s voice in her doorway an hour later.

She turned from her prison window wearily.

“ Yes, I’ve been here three days.” She wanted to say something more to keep Mrs Trueman from talking, but she couldn’t. And

she had thought she was dying for someone to talk to.

Mrs Trueman came in. Her drawn face with its sunken mouth and pointed chin, was just a little more drawn than usual; her dry wispy hair, just a little more dry, her dusty gown just a little more dusty. She looked at Imogen with her bright brown eyes. Imogen looked away.

“My dear—you are ill.”

Imogen shivered a little. She did not answer. Mrs Trueman came nearer and laid a hand on the girl's shoulder.

“Not you, my dear, not you,” she said patting the shoulder. “There can't be anything wrong with you, not with you.” Her nervous words were half questioning.

The touch of her was unbearable. Imogen pulled her shoulder away, as gently as she could, and pushed forward a chair.

“You have brought Fulmani,” she said in what seemed to her a harsh voice.

“Yes—it took me a month to find her.” Mrs Trueman sat down, erect as always. “I found her in a Mohammedan's house. He had bought her from those students.”

“Students? How many?”

“I don’t know how many, they had her between them.”

“And she consented? Oh—how disgraceful.”

Mrs Trueman’s eyes grew red suddenly. Her mouth twisted.

“My dear, my dear, you don’t understand. She is only a child. They terrorized her. She is an Indian girl, weak and ill, and disgraced. They are fiends, some of these students. They threatened her with—oh, you don’t understand—” Tears rolled down her face.

“No, you are right. I don’t understand.”

There was a silence.

“And what will become of her?” the girl asked at last.

“Muda Begam will keep her until her child is born, then we must find a husband for her.”

“That too?”

“It’s the only thing. Her parents are exiled.”

“Good God—what are these women made of?”

“They’re made of just the same stuff as

you. If you were weak and ill and afraid, with nowhere to go and nothing to do, and a child of shame in your womb, that a devil had given you, you would do just the same."

"No, I would kill myself."

"Ah, but you can't."

"What do you mean?"

"Fulmani knows that much, that souls don't die. She thinks she would be born again in a snake or a beetle, poor child, but she knows as we know, that she would go on living all the same."

There was a cough outside the door. It was the mole with a note this time. But it was Annandale, not Choula, who had come for her.

She turned with fierce relief to the indomitable, draggled woman sitting there.

"Mrs Digby is ill. They have sent for me."

Half an hour later, when she was departing with Annandale, she realized that she had not seen Fulmani. She rushed back up the steps and along the verandah whither Mrs Trueman had disappeared. Fulmani was sitting on the

edge of the bed motionless. She lifted her eyes heavily as Imogen entered. Not a ray of expression passed over her face.

That was a horrible idea, that one must live for ever.

CHAPTER III

ANNANDALE wanted to talk, and although almost everything he said bit into her soreness, just because his need for expression was so pitifully obvious, she let him go on. He had returned from his archæological picnic a day too late, and from the white worry of him and the reiteration of his groaning sighs, one might have imagined that he was responsible for everything, whereas she knew that she herself was. He seemed to her absurd in his futile and egotistical remorse, she had always despised him a little; and yet now, she was forced to sympathize with something humble and desperate in his attitude towards Sue.

Sue, he said, sitting opposite Imogen in the railway carriage, his knees and shoulders hunched miserably together, had trusted him to take care of Bobbie and he had failed. A particular cursed "find" had so thrilled his artistic soul that he had forgotten everything else. He had actually been browsing as placid as a cow in his

little ruin not ten miles from the scene of the catastrophe, and not a suspicion had he had of anything being up until he had walked into Con-cannon's empty bungalow. Alarmed then, he had fled to the Digby's where he had discovered the Colonel on his knees beside his wife's bed. He spoke figuratively, of course, for he was not allowed in the room. Her temperature was a hundred and five, only two days ago that was.

He had spent most of the first night on the verandah outside, listening to the voice of her delirium. The nurses had had to let her husband stay beside her because she kept calling for him. A hundred times, he had heard her. Moggie knew the quality of her voice, the vibrating singing clearness it had.

He had seen Digby only for a moment. A more haggard face he had never beheld. The man must have lost a stone in those two days. It seemed as though pounds of flesh had been gauged out of him erratically, in spots, by a freakish knife.

All the Civil Lines and Indian city, too, for that matter, were clamouring at the gate for news, and it had been his duty for a day to mount guard there. It had been almost thrilling to

read in the faces of those enquirers how beloved she was. That granite pillar, Lady Howard, had blown her nose and wiped her eyes like a child. He believed he had patted her hand. It seemed to be his role to pat people's hands, idiotically.

Choula was assisting the Civil Surgeon. That was why he had not come. The night nurse was not strong enough, so they had sent him for Imogen. It had been Digby's suggestion.

Wonder distilled in her mind. And yet how inevitable that Sue in her extremity should bring them all quite naturally together.

She heard nothing more that Annandale said. Another chance had been given her to save Sue.

Gopi Chand, more comic in his dejectedness than he had ever been before, so that he made her want to sob somehow, was at the station. They drove in silence to the house that she had vowed she would never enter again. Half an hour later, bathed and uniformed she went into the sick room. A little boy, with cheeks aflame and wide burning eyes, was flung across the bed. It was Sue, shorn of her glory, and abandoned of her mind, battling with death.

“A cold sponge at three,” said the doctor from the foot of the bed. Imogen nodded, scarcely noticing that it was Choula.

The world receded for a month. There was only that emaciated little body in the bed and Sue’s voice going on and on ; and a monster that shook the body in its teeth and squeezed agony out of the voice. Digby existed like a huge phantom who gave orders, but existence was a void possessed by that monster of disease, and life a struggle to free the tortured child from its jaws.

It was not until at last the monster was dead and Sue lay blessedly white and still that she was conscious of what it had all meant, the anguish and the love she had spent in those weeks ; but one afternoon someone just looked at her and smiled, and said some little thing about its being all over now, and suddenly she burst into tears. Shaking with uncontrollable sobbings, she fled to her room and threw herself on the bed and cried and cried. It was wonderful to cry like a child and feel unutterably weak and empty. The relief was inexpressible. She let herself go, not caring at all for that much cherished self-control of hers, but overwhelmed

with gratitude to something or someone, for having saved them both, Sue and herself.

And then after a while she ceased crying and lay quiet, and gradually, of their own initiative, things began to reshape themselves. There were only a few things, but they stood before her mind to be reviewed, and she saw that they were new. They were rather difficult to name, because the names were not new, words she herself had scorned and derided, but there was no doubt that they were good. She lay staring at them with a little smile on her lips.

When she went on duty again, Sue was lying with her little boy's head on her arm and her eyes open. Her look summoned Imogen to her side.

"You don't want him now, do you Moggie?" she asked in the faint tremulous voice of her weakness.

"No, dear, I don't want him now."

She closed her eyes, "I knew," she whispered happily.

Imogen smiled. All the things she had wanted, where were they? There was only one thing besides Sue's happiness that she wanted now.

That afternoon, about six o'clock, when she was starting for a walk she met Digby coming in. He was returning from office and looked desperately tired. His face was puffy with deep circles under his eyes, and his hand trembled visibly. He needed a change now as much as Sue.

"You will be able to take her home in less than a month," she said.

He shook his head. "I want you to do that."

"But you must get away. You will break down."

"Impossible."

"Impossible for you to break down?"

"I dunno — but impossible to get away, anyhow."

"The governorship?"

"God no—that's gone. Just sweating."

"You are going to stick it out then?"

"Yes."

She thought swiftly. There was that one thing that she still wanted, and if she took Sue home—and what of the new things she had learned from Sue?

"I will take her," she said. Self sacrifice was one of the names she used to scorn. And then at the sight of his face with that immense

relief upon it, something else happened within her that she was not accustomed to.

“If you think you can trust me,” she added, out of that new fear of herself.

“You saved her life.”

She winced.

“But you did,” he answered to her gesture of denial. “You and Choula. The others had given up. I owe her to you.”

“Oh, don’t, don’t,” she cried. Humility and remorse, they too, were new things with old names.

CHAPTER IV

IMOGEN hesitated. A warm and fragrant darkness pervaded the verandah. Sue, who had been up to dinner for the first time had just been put to bed. Digby and Shalieb were still in the dining-room. The sound of the German's cheerful falsetto followed her; she heard it with foreboding.

Kashi Ram sat in the shadow just beyond the light that came through the window. She sank into a chair in the darkness. The band of light lay on the matting between them. Her fear and her weariness and the heavy sweetness of the mingling perfumes in the night air, and the silence of the man beside her, kept her still. She waited, knowing that nothing could be more unbearable than this same waiting. It occurred to her that Digby had once said he sometimes waited for two hours for an Indian to speak, otherwise, if you began, you never did find out what was in his mind. But this man was not as other Indians, she told herself, and then defiantly

the picture of his mother's house rose before her. She twisted her hands miserably together.

"I am taking Sue home next week," she said at last.

"And I am going on a pilgrimage with Shalieb."

He was at least not an Oriental in his thinking, she reiterated foolishly in the midst of her sudden pain.

He spoke again. "Shall you come back to India?"

"I don't know." Her heart fluttered sickly. She who had always gloried in honest utterance, was dumb now and afraid. Still she waited, but he would not help her. She leaned forward into the light.

"I made you an offer once," she said. It was a miserable, hinting, skulking half-truth, but she could do no more.

"Yes, I know."

"I make it again."

He did not answer. She searched through the darkness to see his face, but it was only her own that was exposed.

"You offered to work with me," he began at

last, "but that is impossible without marriage." He stopped.

"And marriage?"

"That too, is impossible."

It was the same word that Digby had used, an intolerable word. She had not rebelled then, but she rebelled now.

"Why? What do you mean? What does that word mean? Surely we are free to chose."

He broke in. "We can choose to be idiots." His sneer silenced her suddenly. She quivered under it as under a whip. Then suddenly she sobbed—once.

He rose abruptly from his chair and began walking up and down in the heavy scented gloom.

"The freedom to choose means nothing—nothing but the added weight of the duty to succumb to circumstance, not blindly and stupidly, but gracefully. Freedom only means our obligation *to do it better*—the fates pay us the compliment of laying out all the ingredients of the dose separately, and bid us take them together, in our own well-bred way, in short, with the grand air of choosing to do so."

“Be a little more lucid. What are the ingredients? Why can't we marry?”

He stopped before her, in the light now, his eyes burning in that stoic face of his.

“Surely you are playing. You don't need to be told. The snows of Olympus and the sands of the desert, they simply do not mingle.”

“But I ask you to be lucid and literal. I am not playing. Metaphor is no good to me.”

He watched her a moment, then flung away and began walking up and down again. His words, in that scathing tone of his, came jerkily, like spurts of fire, to burn her.

“Why be literal? The literal statement of things is never true. You are English and I am Indian, that sounds like nothing. You are a materialist, I am a mystic, less than nothing. Your blood is white, mine black, the mixture would be coffee colour—just a disgusting misstatement to make you writhe. It is none of these things and all of these things, and something else that cannot be put into words. Let me off—let me off—let it be without expression.”

“No—I don’t agree, and I can’t let it be. There is only one thing in the world that I want now and I will do anything to bring it about. I am not as I used to be. I will cease to be an Olympian. My home shall be in the desert. I will bear half-caste children and love them, and they will be proud of their parentage; I will become an Indian, and a mystic. Why do you laugh? You hurt me. Don’t you see how you hurt me?”

“Hurt you? I laugh because you are the woman I desire and because you are a foolish stupid child. I laugh because you think we are one in mind, whereas I am as old as a grave in the wilderness, and you have only just begun to live; and yet I desire you. I laugh because you say, as though you were talking of buying a bracelet, that you will become a mystic. I laugh because you cannot see and will not see for years and years, and because all I can do now is hurt you and send you away.”

“Do you mean you don’t love me?”

“Good God, I don’t know. I shouldn’t know until I’d been married to you for ten years, and in the meantime there is this little matter of taste that stands in the way.”

“ A matter of taste ? ”

“ Yes, what else ? Surely not a moral question, or a religious question, or a social question, or a racial question, or an economic question, not just a little thing like one of these, but all of them bulked together into a question of taste.”

“ Put it then.”

“ Very well, it’s this : intermarriage is revolting to my taste for the fitness of things.”

She cowered, her hands over her forehead as though to ward off his blows. But there was yet another to follow, the final one that was to fell her, and yet restore her at last with the knowledge of something he did not know, so that she might rise again.

“ And you,” he was saying, “ wanted to do it, because it was, so you thought, a brave and daring thing to do.”

She sank a moment under the sheer pain of it, then she rose.

“ You are wrong at last,” she said.

“ Ah, well——”

“ And where is the young lady ? ” said Shalieb’s voice in the doorway. “ Ah, here. I come to make my adieu.”

She gave him a hand, keeping in the shadow, but he put his other little palm over it and peered up at her. "You will not come to Tibet? There are men there, walled up for life. Come, I will show you. You knock on the wall and a hand comes out of the hole, for food. Come with me to break down the walls. We are not brave are we, Choula—but with you——"

It was unbearable. She pulled her hand away, shrinking back.

"Good-bye," she managed to say.

Digby loomed behind the little German in the doorway.

"We'll all meet some day in London," he said cheerily, "Tibet can't keep you for ever, you know."

The carriage drove up to the steps. Shalieb hobbled down to it.

It seemed to her that she would suffocate with pain as Choula bowed over her hand. She had wanted to ask him one more thing. Was it nothing, all that professional work they had done together? But there was no time now. The carriage lamps lighted up his face. Desperately she looked at it—motionless as bronze and unknowable, and then, suddenly, she felt as

she had felt before that other withered face so like his own, unspeakably lonely.

Her feeling, though he would never believe it, was genuine, and yet, she knew that he would be to her soon, as he had suggested, a grave in the wilderness.

CHAPTER V

“ A LIGHT ? ”

“ Thanks.”

Captain Somebody, she had not caught his name, struck a match and held it for her. She bent forward towards the little flare of light, a cigarette in her mouth, then leaned back against the railing, and his face flared before her out of the shadow as he held the match for himself. Hard and clean, and rather clever and rather brutal, with the same everlasting appeal, a very probable victim. She experienced a slight feeling of nausea.

“ I must go to my patient.”

“ Ah, yes— of course.”

She moved a little away.

“ I may find you later,” said his very well-bred voice.

“ No—I think not—not to-night.”

But to-morrow, or next day, she thought to herself. Yes—perhaps.

Dinner was over and other couples were strolling up and down the deck, hanging over the railings, tucked away in the shadow. The game was still on, the ceaseless tyrannical game.

Sue was asleep in her steamer chair, among her cushions, her lips slightly parted, a hand under her cheek. She looked about fifteen years old.

Imogen stood by the railing. The Indian Ocean, reflecting the stars in its still darkness, seemed almost another sky, and between the two voids, the ship moved silently through a changeless night, as a star, peopled with little human beings, travelling for ever from no beginning to no end.

Annandale had given them tea on that last afternoon, in his very delightful flat, looking out over the bay. And in those wide cool rooms of his, rather quaintly enthroned among his very choice treasures, and established there finally by his gigantic plans for the new museum, she had been unable to resent him; had been forced indeed to admire. It had been, to her surprise, quite a delightful party. He had procured

three nice youths to play tennis with her, and had fed them all with simply wonderful cakes and sweets, and had spread his plans out before Digby, to the latter's immense interest, and by that very exquisite delight of his in their presence had made them all quite happy.

He had talked a lot about everything in a quick amusing way, that made it all seem quite like a picnic spoiled by the rain. Trotter it seemed had made rather a stir in Bombay, before he sailed, had addressed a meeting in the town hall, organized by some Parsee magnates, and had been largely reported in the papers. The purport of his message from the north, had been that India was not ready for Trades Unionism. It had, of course, gone down rather well with the Parsee merchants. In fact, Trotter's retreat had been graceful, almost impressive.

She had said her little say then. Trotter had had a perfectly consistent scheme, she told them. He had been sent for to organize a labour union among the canal hands from the district, and overseers, down through all the five grades of native officers, to the patrols. He had done his

work in perfect good faith, she could vouch for that, and, so far as she knew, with the exception of a small personal gift, the money had been raised from among the wealthy Indians of the Punjab, who had made Badri Nath their treasurer. Trotter had had no ulterior purpose. He had been duped like herself.

Then somebody, one of the youths who had been playing tennis, had asked the Colonel what it had all been about, and why the Badri Naths had been deported, and Digby had not even snubbed him, had only guffawed, and had sent down for Gopi Chand who was holding a levee in the cook house.

They had all questioned Gopi Chand and he had grinned at them all. There had been a man in the bazaar, so he said, talking a wonderful mixture of English and Hindustanii, a man in the bazaar who sold spectacles. Five hundred men had bought spectacles and five hundred men had joined a Trades Union. There had been meetings in a bungalow in Hazratpur district, and there had been a place outside the window where a man lying on his stomach, asleep, might hear what was going on. Trotter

Sahib had been a good master and had paid him well—so well, that he was retiring upon his land. There he had rolled his eyes phenomenally—he had ten children and their stomachs would be full for ever.

It had all seemed like a joke, she had actually forgotten Bobbie for the moment, and now it seemed like a bad dream—a dream of dust and disease. It was only two months since Bobbie's death and the reality of all that hideous plague camp, with its rat-catchers who brought reports, and its corpses and its hurried burials, had departed already. Her throat, she remembered, had been for days, dry and choked with dust. Dust she had had to eat and drink every day, and never even the sound of a little trickling stream, to moisten the blistered seeming of things. Digby had stood it for twenty years and would stand it for ten more. Sue would go back to it. Choula was lost in it for ever—but she was free of it, thank God.

The air was cool and damp, and the sea, delicious, black, unfathomable, was carrying her away.

She began to whistle an air from Carmen. London swam before her, enticing, welcoming, assuring.

Susan's voice spoke her name.

"Yes, dear. Do you want to go to bed now? You've been asleep."

"Sit down a little."

Sue's face was smiling in the shadow. Imogen took her hand, stroking it. She didn't pretend to understand Sue's smiles.

"How quickly you recover Moggie, dear."

"Yes." Then after a little. "I don't believe in vain regrets." Then after another silence—"Besides—I can't help it."

"No—that's it."

"You wouldn't have me pretend."

"No."

"What would you have for me, Susan mine?"

"Just whatever you want now."

"Well—I think I know—and I'm going to look for it."

"It?"

"A husband and babies."

"And in the meantime?"

“Work—just common-or-garden medicine, a practise somewhere,,”

There was a silence.

“George will be back to-morrow, it will be getting hot. I can see him, in that revolving chair, dripping, with a punkah going.”

Imogen had a picture of him there, governing a million people from that smoky, sweltering room.

“He did it, you know,” she said, half to herself, “he put it through.”

“Yes, he does things.”

“And Choula sees them.”

Sue turned her head towards Moggie, her eyes questioning in the shadow, but she said nothing.

“Yes,” said the girl, after a moment, “I asked Choula to marry me and he wouldn’t. It was a question of taste with him. Not with me. It didn’t revolt me. I have no taste you know. I must be rather coarse.”

Sue shook her head. “No, my dear, never, never that.”

“Ah well, I don’t know. Anyway I begin to see that he was right, only, besides the question

of taste, there was something else. I adored his mind and didn't want to lose it; whereas, he didn't want to be bothered. I'm not going to moon about. I won't be unhappy, nobody shall make me. I just won't."

They were silent. The voices of men came from the smoking room. The engines throbbed beneath them.

Sue rose from her cushions, and Imogen gathering them under one arm put the other about that thin, thin person, and the feel of it hurt her suddenly with an unexpected sense of all that had gone to procure that emaciation.

It occurred to her that there had been a revolution, and that nothing remained for her, out of it all, but just Sue's weakness and that inexpressible new yearning pain of her own, for that same frailty.

Dumbly, she put Sue to bed, tucking her into the narrow ship's bunk as one would tuck up a child. Sue was very, very weary. She lay there quite still.

Toil—that was all that remained, Choula had said, toil and love, to renew the hearts of the old.

It remained to be seen whether she could carry on those two simple things.

She began brushing her hair. "Who was that man you were talking to," asked Sue from her bunk.

"Oh, just a man."



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